



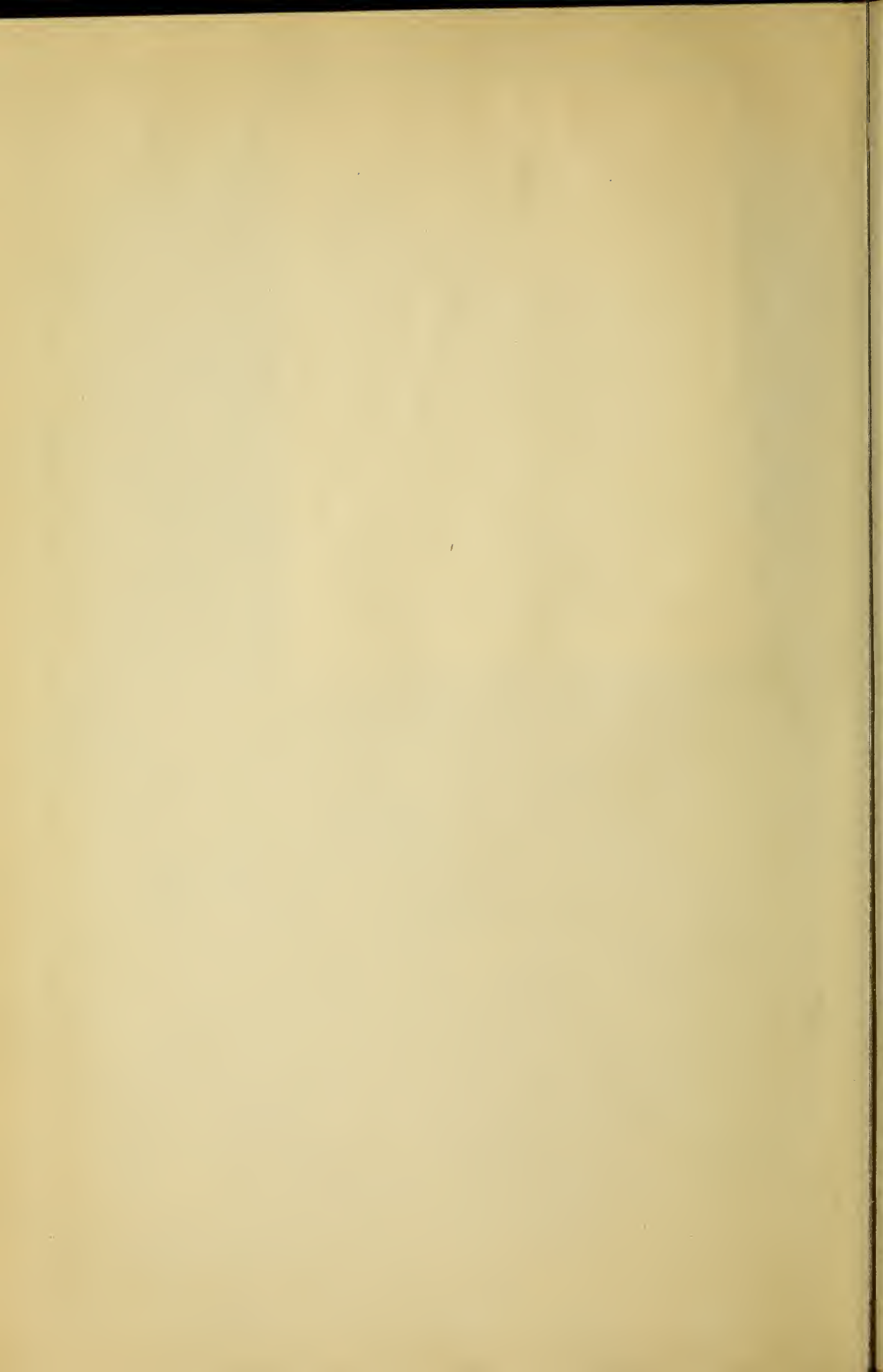


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This book is the first English translation of an exceedingly rare treatise on mystical prayer, written in French in the seventeenth century. Its author, François Malaval, the "blind saint of Marseille," lived at the height of the great French mystical period, and much of his book gives its teaching on contemplation in a singularly pure yet simple form. Towards the end of his life the outbreak of the Quietistic controversy involved him in the general condemnation of those who taught "passive prayer"; hence the obscurity into which his work, once widely read, has fallen. But there can be little doubt that Malaval's teaching, properly understood, is both sane and orthodox; and this book is a valuable addition to the literature of the interior life.

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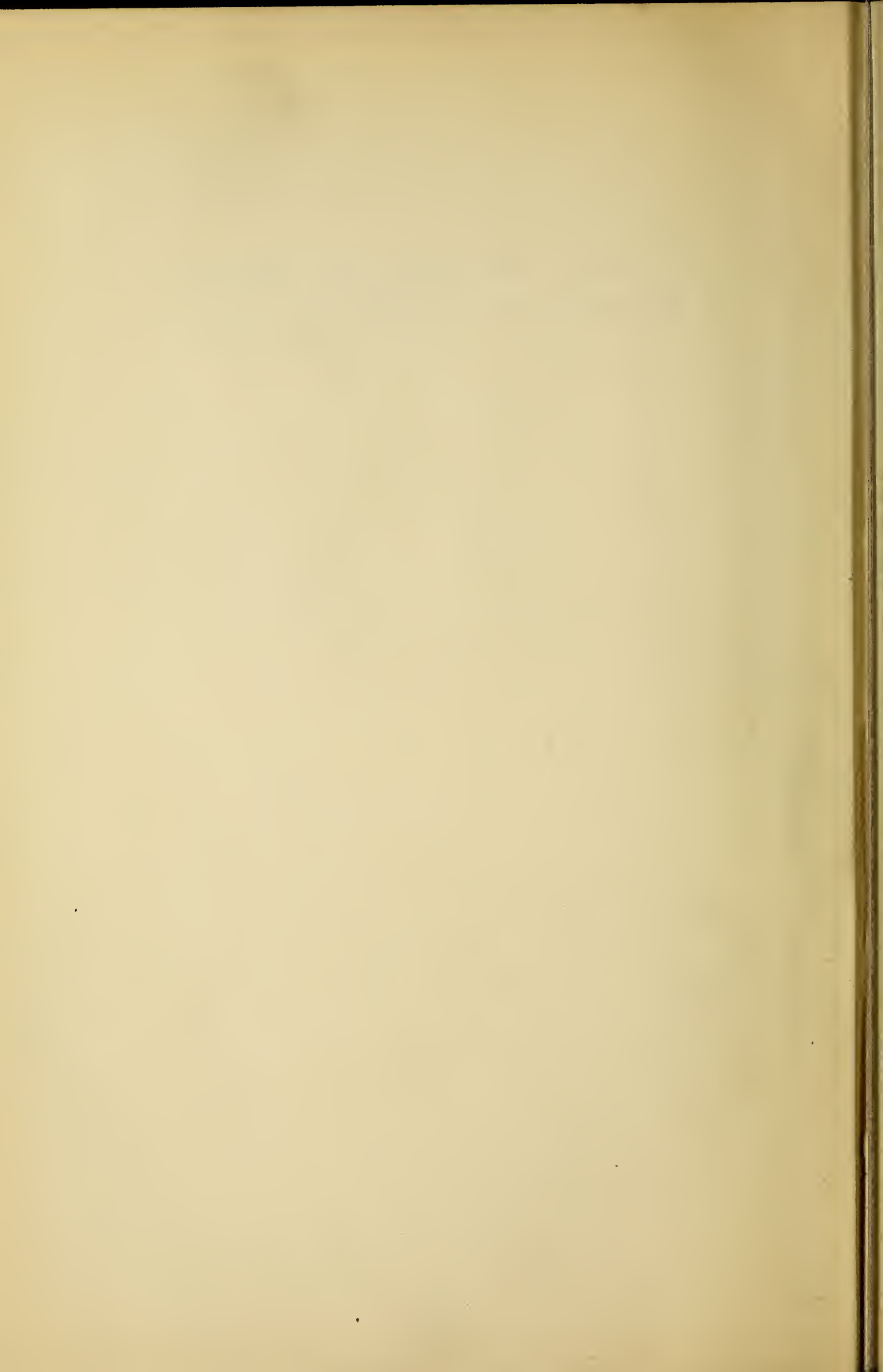








A SIMPLE METHOD OF RAISING  
THE SOUL TO CONTEMPLATION



A SIMPLE METHOD  
OF RAISING THE SOUL  
TO CONTEMPLATION

IN THE FORM OF A DIALOGUE BY  
FRANÇOIS MALAVAL

1627—1719

TRANSLATED BY  
LUCY MENZIES  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
EVELYN UNDERHILL

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## INTRODUCTION

### I

The long life of François Malaval, whose only important work is now, for the first time, translated into English, covered the second phase and final decadence of that great outburst of mystical religion which distinguished seventeenth-century France. When he was born in 1627, Madame Acarie and St. François de Sales were already dead. St. Chantal had fourteen years to live, Pascal was four years old. He was the contemporary of Brother Lawrence; and there are many points at which the teaching of the scholar-saint of Marseilles reminds us of that of the simple and untaught Carmelite. Though his work preceded that of the Quietists, he lived through, and suffered under, the disastrous results of their excesses. During the latter part of his life, he saw the rise and fall of Madame Guyon and the "new mystics," and the conflict between Bossuet and Fénélon; and shared—as most readers will feel, unjustly—in the condemnation meted out to the doctrines of Molinos and Falconi. A few echoes of the controversies which led up to these events, with other traces of contemporary influences upon his thought, will be found in his book; but do nothing to disturb its deep and tranquil beauty.

It is tempting to find in the circumstances of Malaval's life a clue to the special character of his teaching. A Provençal by birth, the son of a rich and highly respected

citizen of Marseilles, he became blind when nine months old; but his father seems to have determined from the first, that this misfortune should do nothing to deprive him of his intellectual inheritance. As soon as he was old enough, François was sent to the Oratorian fathers of Marseilles to be educated. Here, with the help of a reader-secretary provided by his father, he learnt Greek and Latin, and began the study of philosophy; passing on to the Dominican courses in theology and canon law, and taking his doctor's degree. Great intellectual power, an amazingly retentive memory, and a gay and courageous spirit, helped him to triumph over his blindness, and build up in the darkness a far richer and fuller life than that enjoyed by the majority of men. Nor must we think of him as a hermit-contemplative, totally absorbed in the study of divinity or the wonders of his secret communion with God. He set great store on human intercourse, and always encouraged his pupils to seek it. From the age of twenty-one he made every effort to get into touch with the chief scholars of the day, lost no opportunity of meeting and talking with them, was seen everywhere, took a keen interest in scientific problems, and was one of the founders of the Academy of Marseilles. His reputation grew quickly. Scholars and ecclesiastics resorted to him both for intellectual and for spiritual help. Cardinal Cibo, Cardinal Bona, and Queen Christina of Sweden were among his friends; and before he was thirty he had laid the foundations of the vast correspondence which continued to increase until his death at the age of ninety-two.

The apparatus by which the blind scholar thus maintained his contacts with the world of action and thought was organized with characteristic care. Throughout his life, it was his habit to take boys into his house and educate them, in exchange for their services as readers



and secretaries: forming each according to his capacity, and training many for the religious life. Good families were eager to avail themselves of this privilege; and the pupils, who remained with him for many years, became expert librarians, handled the immense and growing correspondence, and acted as the eyes of their blind master. It is needless to insist on the difficulties and limitations of such a method, its ceaseless demands on patience and courage. Yet no one ever heard Malaval complain of his affliction, or saw in him any traces of depression. "Being blind, I wish to carry this cross with gaiety till death," was his only reply to a poet who had ventured to offer his sympathy in somewhat lugubrious verse. That tranquil death to self which he set so high in the ranks of the spiritual virtues, included a quiet forgetfulness of his own loss: and few, reading the passages in which he urges his pupil to "open her eyes by a lively faith," or exclaims that God is a "Sun who shines day and night on us and in us, and we will hardly open our eyes to look at Him!" would guess that these experiences were never known to the writer in the physical sense.

Yet when we do know this, we perceive that the extraordinary simplicity and straightforwardness which mark his descriptions of contemplative prayer, the power with which he handles the difficult concept of "imageless thought," and the vivid life he infuses into the most abstract terms of mystical devotion, do owe something to that closing of the eye of nature which lent a greater intensity and concentration to the interior sight. "He who sees God in this darkness sees a great Abyss . . . and sees all things plunged in this infinite Abyss." The doctrine is in essence that of Dionysius the Areopagite. Yet the realism and vigour of its presentation surely witness to the peculiar *attrait* and secret experience of

the blind saint; of whom we could say, as he says of the Fathers, "the one thing that charmed them most was God."

Meditative by nature, and contemplative by vocation, Malaval's interior life seems to have matured quickly. He was a profound student of the mystics; and his book reveals to us something of the depth and beauty of that life of prayer to which he attained under their guidance. We may well suppose that personal experience lies behind such passages as that in which he tells his pupil that "sometimes three and four hours may pass with such facility and sweetness" in contemplation, that a soul which abandoned itself without reserve would be exhausted. When your soul has learned not to receive too many outward impressions, he says to her again, God will become "the light of your eyes, so that you will see everything for Him and in Him." Contemporary opinion soon came to regard him as a saint. "All the pens in the world," says one witness, "cannot express that which was seen and felt, when Malaval was prostrate before the holy altars."

Being constantly asked for advice upon mental prayer, which was at this period the special preoccupation of the devout, whilst he was still in the early thirties he put together, in Latin, some notes in scholastic terms on the Prayer of Quiet. This little work was circulated privately, but soon became generally known; and was so widely appreciated, that Malaval was urged to publish something of a simpler and more generally comprehensible kind on the same theme. The result was the "First Treatise" of the present book, which was issued alone in 1664. Its declared object was to teach, in a simple and practical way, that "acquired contemplation," that practice of the Presence of God, which Malaval believed to be the real devotional path of many souls. The instant success of this book, which passed quickly through three editions,



was translated into Italian, and approved by many of the chief religious personalities of the time, led him to expound his doctrine more fully in the Dialogues of the Second Treatise; for the benefit, as he ironically observes, of "those spiritual persons who are not sufficiently simple in their minds to be content with so simple a practice" as that which the First Treatise describes. The complete work in its present form was issued in 1669, furnished with official approbations, and dedicated to Cardinal Bona, one of its writer's firmest friends. It was well received, and became extremely popular. From this time until its condemnation in 1695 by Bossuet—who had at first approved it—it was said to be "in all hands": including, we may be sure, many in which its writer would not have wished to place it. No doubts were cast upon the orthodoxy of its doctrine. It was highly valued by the austere Guilleré; and the celebrated Abbé d'Estival, one of Malaval's most ardent disciples, preached on it and recommended its teaching.

Nevertheless, this beautiful book had appeared at a moment in which it had most to suffer from the circumstances of the time. The great mystical movement of the seventeenth century had now almost spent itself, and was already approaching that perilous phase in which the interior life threatens to become popular; its most sacred mysteries are freely discussed, and easy-going imitations of passive prayer seem an attractive alternative to the disciplines of ordinary piety. Nothing was farther from Malaval's mind than this shallow mysticity, yet it was inevitable that the reaction it provoked should also be directed against his teaching. The very frank description in Dialogue VI of the common objections urged against contemplative prayer, and the ease with which its nature was misunderstood, reveals the state of the religious

climate in his day. Those who are "always demanding something of God," he says, "abuse those who demand nothing but God"—the perennial quarrel between the Marthas and Marys of the devotional life. Though his creative period preceded by some years the real Quietist movement, and though he safeguards his own sublime doctrine against quietistic interpretation at every point, the Preface to the Second Treatise makes it clear that he roused hostile criticism among "opinionated spirits" from the first. Nevertheless, he continued for several years to enjoy full official approval. In 1674, at the request of Cardinal Bona, Pope Clement X permitted him, by special dispensation, to receive minor orders—for no blind man may be a priest—and this admittance to ecclesiastical status gave Malaval great joy. The first attack upon his work came in 1682, from the Italian Jesuit, Segneri; and though Segneri was censured, the trouble broke out again a few years later. The *Spiritual Guide* of Molinos had appeared in 1675. The excessive character of its doctrine, and the dangerous results of its popularity, were soon recognized. It caused a widespread distrust of the whole theory and practice of "passive prayer," which was regarded as hostile to institutional and sacramental religion; and even—on the strength of some of the more extreme statements of the Quietists—to morality itself. In the general, and often ill-informed, campaign against Quietist tendencies which was now set going, the most innocent teachers of contemplative prayer fell under suspicion; and amongst them Malaval. Madame Guyon's *Moyen Court* had appeared in 1685; and its enthusiastic outpourings and wholesale recommendations of passivity were said, with entire injustice, to reproduce his opinions. The book itself was sometimes even confused with the *Pratique Facile*. Molinos was condemned in 1687, and



it was rumoured that he had been Malaval's master. Madame Guyon was imprisoned in 1688, and in the same year the Italian translation of Malaval's book was proscribed, along with the *Alphabet* of the Spanish Quietist, Falconi. Malaval at once submitted, saying, "I lay my book at the feet of Holy Church, and my heart will not be troubled thereby." He sent his act of submission to all the ecclesiastical authorities, and entered into silence on the subject of Quietism. The book, nevertheless, continued to circulate in France; and Marseilles remained loyal to its deeply-loved saint.

Malaval only broke silence once again. Bossuet's intense and unfortunate reaction to the clumsy extravagances of the "new mystics," and his deplorable conflict with Fénelon are well known. He included in his condemnation Malaval, whose work he had previously approved. Yet a careful comparison of the *Pratique Facile* with the doctrine of Bossuet's *Etats d'Oraison*—in which Malaval is contemptuously dismissed as "a layman without theology"—shows how little really separated these two great lovers of prayer. It is one of the tragedies of spiritual history that those who are following the same path to the same end, should waste so much energy in criticizing one another's boots: and this futile occupation was developed to a fine art in the Quietist controversies of the seventeenth century. The chief accusation which Bossuet brought against Malaval—that of failing to give due place to the Humanity of Christ—might be brought, in some degree, against all Catholic mystics of the theocentric and Dionysian type; such as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, or even St. Augustine or St. John of the Cross. But any one who reads with care the Fifth Dialogue of this book will perceive how ill-founded it is in his case. In a Pastoral Charge of 16th April, 1695,

Bossuet definitely associated Malaval's name in one condemnation with those of Molinos and Madame Guyon. He replied in an "Open Letter," justifying the orthodoxy of his own life, works, and practice, and refuting the sixty-eight condemned propositions of Molinos. This letter was sent to all the French bishops; but was ignored by Bossuet, who desired no checks on his anti-Quietist campaign. In 1703 it was placed on the Index. Malaval was now an old man. The last years of his long life appear to have been spent in a retirement which we may believe to have been full of the peace that his writings exhale. "Philosophers know God; Christians believe in Him; meditative souls consider Him; but the contemplative possesses Him."

## II

If we are to grasp the real intention of Malaval's teaching, and avoid the misconceptions to which it has been exposed, there are certain plain facts which we must keep in mind. First, the scope of his book is strictly that of its title. It does not profess to deal with the whole vast country of spiritual experience, or to teach a practice suited to all souls. Did it offer itself as a complete guide to Christian spirituality, we should have to acknowledge that its writer was deficient both in the historic and institutional sense, too individualistic, too abstract. But this would be entirely to misunderstand his aim. There are important aspects of the life of prayer, and paths to union with God, on which he does not touch; yet which he would certainly acknowledge to be the true *attrait* of many souls. Though he holds—and surely with justice—that his own path is open in its simplicity to many who have not yet tried it, he

is keenly alive to the diversity between spirits, and anxious to safeguard the rightful liberty of each. "All the practices of the Church are good, but they do not suit everybody"; and again, "We are not obliged to draw water from every fountain of a city, provided that the fountain from which we do draw gives sufficient water to quench our thirst." The acute knowledge of human temperaments displayed in his list of persons for whom he "does not wish contemplation," and his constant warning against browsing on mystical books show how safely he may be trusted on these points. He writes by declaration for "those capable of interior things, well mortified in the exterior senses and passions, greatly attracted to God and His Pure Love": in fact, for "Philothea," the soul that desires Him "with a love that is above all love, and a delight above all delight."

That which Malaval offers us, therefore, is not a complete treatise on the interior life, but a strictly practical introduction to contemplative prayer; which takes for granted the normal Christian background of discipline and practice, and assumes that those who desire its teaching are already faithful and fervent members of the Church. He takes up the training of the soul at the point at which it has already achieved conquest over the senses, and mortified at least the cruder expressions of self-love. To read him without realizing this, is like reading the second part of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, and ignoring the existence of the first. His real meaning and intention will only be understood when these facts are borne in mind; and even so, perhaps only completely understood by the souls whom he addresses, and who can say with Philothea, "You rather arouse the remembrance of what takes place in me, than give me fresh light." The deceptive simplicity and homeliness of the teaching may easily blind the rest of us to its lofty character, unless we read



with great humility of mind. Those who think there is nothing here beyond an invitation to cultivate the loving gaze of simple piety, or the art of "waiting in the silence," should take to heart this warning:

"When the Saints are obliged to declare these great things in ordinary words, their sayings have always two meanings; the one clear, the other profound; the one which is understood of all, the other which, though expressed by the same words, is only comprehensible to those who have experienced the thing spoken of."

Next, Malaval's doctrine, whilst undoubtedly harmonious with his own experience, and owing its richness and realism to the intensity of his Godward life, is solidly based on the great Catholic tradition of contemplative prayer: a fact upon which he insists in the First Treatise. Three names, as we read him, constantly come to our minds: Dionysius the Areopagite, the writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and St. John of the Cross. The direct influence of the first of these is manifest, especially in the magnificent Dialogue IV. *The Cloud*, at many points so close to his teaching, and beloved by his English contemporary, Father Augustine Baker, he might well have known in the fifteenth-century Latin translation: for it was read and valued in the monastic libraries of the Low Countries and France. He was certainly familiar with the works of the Spanish Carmelites. Though it is St. Teresa to whose authority he appeals in Dialogue III, page after page could be glossed from the writings of St. John of the Cross. Besides these, he depends closely for his theology on St. Thomas; and for spiritual doctrine on St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Bernard, and St. Bonaventura—the usual source-books for writers on contemplation—and also, as we might expect, on his immediate predecessors and compatriots;

especially, I think, Pierre de Bérulle and St. François de Sales. It will be observed that in this list of authorities there is no name tainted with Quietism. Indeed, but for the fact that it appeared at the most unfortunate moment possible for a book dealing with passive prayer, it seems unlikely that the *Pratique Facile* would ever have fallen under suspicion.

The line which separates Quietism from the true and fruitful Prayer of Quiet is admittedly thin: and has not always been drawn in quite the same place. The most orthodox writings on mystical prayer contain statements which, if taken out of their context and given a general application, could be interpreted in a dangerous and Quietistic sense. If Malaval sins here, he does so in the company of such classic teachers as St. John of the Cross, St. Chantal, St. François de Sales, Grou and Caussade. According to the definition of Bossuet, "Quietists are those who, by a *total cessation* of acts towards God, bring into contempt the holy peace of the Prayer of Quiet." Their error, then, does not so much consist in the adoption of a wholly false principle, as in pushing to excess, and applying without discrimination over the whole devotional field, a principle which is true enough when rightly understood and kept in its own place; that is to say, the subordination of the soul's activity to the over-ruling Divine act. They make perfection consist, he says again, in something which is impossible in this life—namely, a ceaseless state of contemplation—suppressing or discouraging many essential religious exercises; such as acts, reflections, vocal prayers, meditations on the Christian mysteries, and all petitions, even those contained in the Lord's Prayer itself.<sup>1</sup> Thus a sacred and fruitful condition, truly characteristic of certain souls at certain times, was dragged

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet: *Instruction sur les Etats d'Oraison*.



into harsh daylight, vulgarized, misunderstood, and proclaimed as a "short cut" to union with God, open to all who chose to embrace it; and there was associated with it the so-called doctrine of the One Act, which taught that "when we have once given ourselves to God, this act holds good for ever, unless we revoke it, and need not be repeated or renewed."<sup>1</sup> The disregard of common human nature, its weakness, vanity, and power of self-deception, which is manifested in this clumsy caricature of the great truth of self-abandonment to the Divine action, was not only ridiculous, but dangerous to spiritual health; and fully explains the alarm which it inspired in those who were responsible for the general well-being of the Church. "Who would believe," says Bremond, with justice, "that a doctrine even more idiotic than scandalous could ever have been approved by saints and scholars?"<sup>2</sup>

But in spite of a few passages which might be open to misunderstanding if read alone, Malaval cannot seriously be charged with Quietist errors. In the First Treatise alone, the direct references to the Sacraments and the Incarnation, and the lesson in simple contemplation based on the Lord's Prayer, show how orthodox was his attitude in respect of the mysteries of faith, and how carefully he strove to maintain the balance between visible and invisible religion. If his book is read as a whole, the steady insistence on the soul's rightful activity, and the need of its willed response to the Divine action, comes out clearly; indeed, his definition of prayer as "a certain impulse of the will tending towards God with all its strength," should alone be enough to acquit him of Quietism. Where he has been misunderstood, this seems to have been the result of attributing a superficial and general meaning to sayings which are really addressed only to particular souls, and are

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Histoire Litteraire*, vol. ii, p. 602.

concerned with the deepest mysteries of the interior life—mysteries unguessed by those who “often speak of God, but seldom speak to Him.”

Like all practical and pastoral mystics, Malaval teaches a very simple, realistic, and supple prayer. We need not analyze it, for its character will be appreciated by all who read with sympathy the First Treatise of his book. He follows traditional doctrine in recognizing two distinct kinds of contemplation—acquired, and infused; natural, and supernatural—though he is careful to say that only God knows the point at which the one passes into the other: nor need the individual soul trouble itself about these discriminations. “God does not tell me to examine His *attrait*, but to follow it.” Acquired contemplation, in those called to it, develops as the reward of a faithful and orderly life of prayer. Those who have been accustomed to regular meditation find themselves less and less able to do it; and are drawn to a more simple waiting on the realized Presence of God. But we need not hurriedly assume that inability to meditate necessarily means a call to contemplation. There are, says Malaval—not without a certain malice—five common obstacles to meditation, which do not point the way to spiritual advance: namely, illness, depression, lack of preparation, wandering attention, and laziness! Genuine contemplative prayer begins as a gentle effort of the soul, aided by the grace of God, which develops “a habit of holding one’s self in His presence, with more or less facility, according to the condition of advancement of each soul.” We shall understand this saying better, if we remember that the word here and elsewhere translated “habit” or “habitude,” for want of a closer equivalent, is the *habitus* of Aristotelian psychology; that is, a fundamental and habitual disposition or inclination, tending to perfect the self in some



particular point. Thus health or beauty may be a *habitus* of the body; any intellectual or moral quality a *habitus* of the soul. In this sense, acquired contemplation arises from, and expresses that soul's fundamental *habitus*, or tendency to God. It is, in essence, "nothing but a habitual gaze fixed on God Present." This habitude, as it develops, more and more abolishes the need for successive devotional acts. Like a carpenter who does not require to say, "Now I am going to work!" every time he picks up a tool, because he has the habit of regular work and naturally resumes it; so the soul accustomed to simple contemplation need not deliberately renew her habitual desire to practise that Presence of God which has become as natural as breathing, and is the expression of her profound metaphysical thirst. It was perhaps this passage, so innocent when read in its context, which caused Malaval to be suspected of teaching the extravagances of the One Act.

It is true, that even "acquired contemplation" depends on God's prevenient action; since He is always the immanent First Mover of the soul, and real cause of all its acts, "seeking us with an even greater thirst and eagerness than we seek Him." In a magnificent passage of the First Treatise, Malaval declares the august truth of the Divine Immanence in creation and the dwelling of creation in God, as the very sanction and foundation of contemplative prayer. "What happiness to be always in God! and how little recognized that happiness is!" Nevertheless, this prayer is produced and maintained by the soul's own effort and intention. "All God's dealings with men are reasonable and humane: and He wishes that we should do all that we can do, before He does for us what is beyond our own powers." It is true His steady action over-rules our small activity, which is, by



turns, too fast, too slow, too devious. But "no one must say that we do not truly act here": for willed attention and adherence to God is the most absolute action of which the soul is capable. That "simple, pure, and general gaze" is a real act of will; and the soul further co-operates with the Divine action to the fullest extent possible to it by receiving without resistance the penetrating and purifying effects of that sight, with its ceaseless mortification of self-love, and manifesting its fruit in its daily life.

Acquired contemplation, as Malaval really taught it, therefore seems clear of the suspicion of Quietism. A willed act of correspondence with God, however deeply hidden below the conscious levels, is at its very heart. When he goes on to speak of "infused contemplation," however, his language is more easily misunderstood; especially by those for whom his teaching is not intended. For in this state, the soul's own action is held to be more and more superseded by the Divine action. It is wholly abandoned, and God Himself acts in it. But this distinction, real enough for theology, is one which the soul itself need not and should not make. It is enough for it "to be led by the hand, without being shown the way it is being led." What does it matter, says Philothea, whether the steps we are mounting are concrete or marble, so long as they lead to God? The truly contemplative soul, drawing nearer and nearer to the Holy as more and more it leaves itself behind, "does not desire to know anything with its own knowledge or love anything with its own love: it desires to know with the knowledge of God and love with His divine love." "Thou art the love wherewith the heart loves Thee," said St. Augustine. Those for whom the collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity is a realistic account of possible experience, and not merely a pious

formula, have grasped the very essence of "infused contemplation." But its pains and joys can only be known to those who are abandoned in naked faith to the intimate action of God.

Philothée j'ay pretendu de vous introduire dans le jardin de l'espoux, mais non pas de vous en décrire les fleurs et les fruits. Ce jardin de la contemplation est grand et vaste, c'est a luy de vous mener par les allées qu'il luy plaira; soyez fidelle et Dieu sera liberal. Ne prevenez jamais Dieu, suivez-le toujours, et ne vous mettez en peine que d'aimer et non pas de voir.

EVELYN UNDERHILL.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

When I accepted the rare privilege of translating the *Pratique facile pour élever l'Âme à la Contemplation*, I was living a life of comparative leisure. I knew nothing about Malaval's history, but meant to take the first opportunity of finding out, in the British Museum, what the outward circumstances of his life had been, for one does not live in the mind of an author, as one must do in translating his work, without wishing to know all one can about him.

But I had no sooner received the book—which is of priceless value, being, so far as we can ascertain, the only copy in existence—then I was asked to undertake a post which has since made it impossible for me to work in the Museum. And so I had to translate the book without knowing anything about its author. It puzzled me a good deal; the author had evidently not read his proofs; there were many obvious misprints, many more printer's errors than one would expect a careful author to overlook. Here and there, lines which evidently ought to be on one page were found on another; and finally, the first page of the First Treatise was identical with the first page of the Second. One of them had evidently been copied from the other; and the context suggests that the first page of the First Treatise is missing altogether, and that a resourceful printer, knowing that something must be printed there, had had the happy thought of simply reprinting the first page of the Second Treatise. This all seemed very strange, that a man of Malaval's ideals should let his book go out in such an untidy state.



And then I learnt, as you have read in the Introduction, that Malaval was blind almost from his birth. I have ventured to relate these personal particulars because the knowledge of Malaval's blindness, thus suddenly revealed to me, has filled me with overwhelming wonder and admiration for his book; it throws an other-worldly light on many of his similes, and particularly on the light-imagery, which, in common with so many of the Saints, he so constantly uses. He writes in so many places of spiritual darkness and blindness that when in his Dedication to Cardinal Bona, he touchingly thanks God "for the exterior darkness which has covered my eyes almost since the beginning of my life," I did not realize he was writing of actual physical blindness. Spiritual blindness, he tells us, is the obscurity of some and the light of others. From his obscurity, Malaval shows us a great light. He has indeed "brought down the greatest lights of Heaven to illumine the things of God," and this light "which springs from faith, and is indeed faith itself, becomes clearer and more luminous" the more we try to enter into his mind, the more we try to follow the teaching he offers us. His utter simplicity, his crystal clearness, and his certainty, as well as his artlessness and delicate humour all make us delight in his book—but the fact that it was written by a blind man seems to shed a peculiar radiance over it.

I have mentioned the obscurities of the text because I want the reader to realize that in many places it is difficult to be certain as to the exact word Malaval intended. Another reason, besides that of typographical errors, is that during the two hundred and sixty years of its existence, this little vellum-covered volume—yellowed by age, and reminiscent of an Elzevir in beauty of form and type—had offered hospitality to a bookworm other than the



human kind. It had eaten its way delicately up and down the book, devoting most of its attention to the margins, but once or twice, greedy of knowledge, eating along the line, and so removing a word or part of a word altogether.

There is little to say about the actual translation; the translator shelters her inadequacy behind Malaval's excuses for St. Teresa when he writes of the occasional ambiguity of her expression; "too great exactitude," he naïvely remarks, "might lead to doubt whether it was really a woman who wrote." On the authority of Baron von Hügel, who regarded it as untranslatable, the word *attrait*, so characteristic of Malaval, has been retained in the original, and italicized throughout. Wherever the sense permits, scriptural quotations have been given in the Authorized Version.

As to bibliographical details: the First Treatise of the *Pratique Facile* was published in 1664: the whole work was enlarged and republished with the Dedication to Cardinal Bona in 1669. It was then translated into Italian, and a third French edition appeared in 1673. Malaval's other works are without importance. His *Poésies Spirituelles* were published in Paris in 1671, and his *Vie de S. Philippe Benizi* in Marseilles in 1672. From 1664 to 1695 the *Pratique Facile* had a great circulation in France. But the evil notoriety given to Quietism by the Molinos controversy in 1685, and the extravagances of Madame Guyon, who was imprisoned in 1688, led to Malaval being condemned, and his books being put on the Index, the Italian edition also being proscribed in 1688. Malaval submitted, but his work remained on the Index, and the letter in which he defended himself against sharing the errors of Molinos (Malaval was said quite falsely to be his pupil), was also put on the Index in 1703. These facts account for the rarity of this book.

It remains for the writer of the Introduction and the translator to express their thanks to the owner of this priceless original, who has so generously lent it for the purposes of translation; thus permitting them the great privilege of making a lost masterpiece of seventeenth-century spirituality, available to modern readers. For, so far as they know, no other version in any language now exists. Their warmest gratitude is also due to the Abbé Bremond, who has kindly and fully put at their disposal his expert knowledge of the sources for Malaval's life.

The translator having the last word, wishes to use it to express her deep indebtedness to the writer of the Introduction, not only for revising the translation, and for adding the footnotes, but for her most generous help and guidance throughout.

L. M.

*Extract from the Sanction of the King*

By grace and sanction of the King, given on October 27, 1669, signed by the King in his MAIDEN Council and sealed.

It is granted to Florentin Lambert, Bookseller at Paris, to publish a book entitled *Pratique facile pour élever l'Âme à la Contemplation*. And it is forbidden to all publishers, librarians and other persons, to print, sell, or produce, any other impression than that which has been published by the said Lambert or those authorized by him, for the time of seven years from the day it shall have been published for the first time, on pain of confiscation of the counterfeit copies, of 1500 livres fine, and of all damages, expenses, and interests. This will apply to the Extracts from this book as well as to the original.

Registered in the Book of the Society of Printers and Librarians of this city, December 6, 1669.

*Signed,*

ANDRÉ SOUBRON,

Paris.

Syndic.

*First published March 15, 1670.*

*Sacramentum Regis abscondere bonum est :  
opera autem Dei revelare et confitere honorificum est.*

Tobaie, 12.

*It is good to keep close the secret of a King,  
but to reveal gloriously the works of God.*



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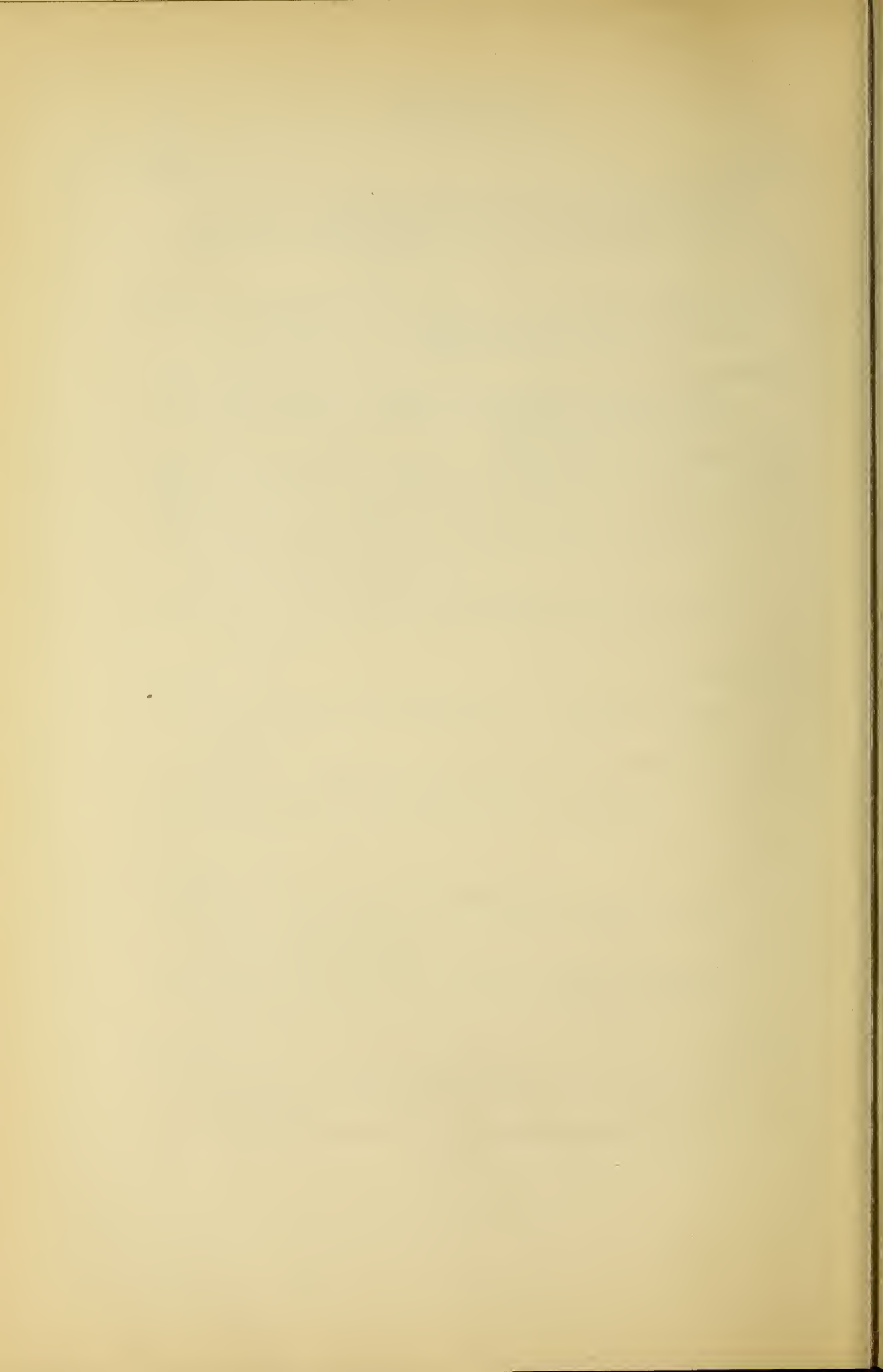
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## DEDICATION

*To His Eminence Monseigneur Cardinal BONA*

*MONSEIGNEUR,*

*By the time the news of your Eminence's promotion had reached the Christian world, this work was already in the Press. I had resolved to commit it to Providence, and to give it no other Protector than God Himself who is its Object and its material and for whose glory it has been written. But Providence would seem to have expressed Himself in this event, and after the special marks of kindness with which you have honoured me, I feel as if Heaven were prompting me by this new promotion to give some public testimony of my gratitude and to make you a solemn assurance of my respect and veneration in offering to you this Second Treatise which I now publish. Providence, MONSEIGNEUR, to whom I have always found it well to abandon myself blindly, has allowed me to see the fruits of my First Treatise, and has inspired me with the thought of writing a Second to elucidate the same subject more fully.*

*Persons of learning and piety having taken copies of my First Treatise (which had been reprinted for the third time) to Rome, it was honoured by your approbation, and you had the goodness to make inquiries about its author. That which I now offer YOUR EMINENCE is nothing but an amplification of that which you deigned to approve, a fuller elucidation, I mean to say, of that excellent practice of contemplation experienced by so many good souls, and in which even those who accompany their learning with true piety*

*find every day more significant obscurities; a darkness more luminous than all the learning of the day. What a great good it is, MONSEIGNEUR, to contemplate God incessantly, to admire Him, to taste Him, to find in Him all our joy and all our peace. How small indeed are Heaven and earth compared with Him! How good it is to rest in nothing but God alone, and to concentrate in Him all our thoughts and all our affections. And, moreover, the diversity of Christian works is never more lovely than when it tends towards this excellent unity which make us see God in all things without dividing Him, and all things in God without mingling them. You are eminently aware of this truth, MONSEIGNEUR, and you delight in it. The unction you spread abroad in your works is not the pure result of dry or ordinary learning, but of a veritable profusion of the Divine Spirit which makes use of your lights and your ardours to illumine and arouse your readers through that which you write. It is this singular piety and this sublime and universal wisdom, which, having made you so long an example and an oracle in the capital of Christianity, have raised you to the rank you hold in the Church to-day; it is to your great virtues and your shining lights alone that you owe your purple. It was fitting, after having been so long consulted by Sovereign Pontiffs and by the different Congregations on all the difficulties which presented themselves in the most important matters, that you should have become one of the pillars and intelligences of the Church; that your particular beliefs as to doctrine and custom should have led to solemn and public decisions, and that you should have the glory of presiding in this Dignity over Assemblies in which you had previously had the honour of speaking with such wisdom and discretion.*

*Every one who knows YOUR EMINENCE intimately knows how carefully you have always preserved moderation and humility amid the continual plaudits you have received*



*from every side, and with what care and ardour you have always shunned the legitimate honours you merited. You, MONSEIGNEUR, were as surprised and astonished when suddenly raised to the purple as if the most unworthy of men had been honoured by it. Illustrious witnesses have told us of your groans and sighs, and how much more dearly you cherished the peace of holy religion to which you had been dedicated for forty-five years, than this eminent dignity to which you have been made to rise. The new purple in which you are now robed is assuredly a heavy weight for your extraordinary humility, but through this very humility it becomes the more striking and august, and the praiseworthy confusion with which you blushed on receiving it, sheds a radiance over it which it did not before possess.*

*Thus, on every count, MONSEIGNEUR, Heaven be praised that you have no ground for fear in your elevation. For seeing that you had never regarded anything in the world as so great as God when you were as yet nothing but a private individual, this new dignity cannot be for you an uninspiring fact. You, in your own person, elevate that dignity itself, and you must pray that God, whom you esteem above all earthly dignities will place you above the dangers and perils which surround great honours. For surely this Sovereign Lord, who takes pleasure in exalting the humble, will also have the goodness to support them; the foundations of humility which He is accustomed to lay in them, are even deeper than the dignities of the world are high.*

*You have always been great in religion with that greatness which accompanies the humble, and you will be a religious in your Dignity because of that very piety which never forsakes the humble to whatever rank they may rise. You have merited all honours without seeking them, and you will possess them tranquilly without experiencing their evil effects. Seeing that God has not raised you in His Church save that*

*you might be a refuge to the good, and a terror to the wicked, He has obliged Himself to be the refuge of your innocence, and the terror of your invisible enemies who may, perhaps, attack eminent virtue, but who have not the power to overthrow it. You have made your wisdom shine forth on all celebrated occasions on which it has been employed, and God makes it shine most brightly here in making you see more clearly than ever that everything is vanity on the earth, and that the supreme height of honour is to let God reign in him who receives honour. By your example you have radiated an infinity of good, not only on your Order which you have ruled with such glory, but also on all those who in their need have implored your charity, and God pleases Himself in the rank you occupy to-day to give you the greatest of all blessings and the most perfect of all gifts which can be given to those who are raised above their fellows, namely to do all things for His Glory and His Love, and to submit rank and dignity to Him with as much abandonment as the most trifling action. Finally, MONSEIGNEUR, you have been, as much as lay within your power, a pattern of behaviour both in conduct and in speech. And now God renders Himself more directly than ever your Pattern and your Law to the end that your justice may be as eminent as your rank, so that you will ever become more worthy of governing. He makes known to all the world that it was not so much the surety of your retreat that made you good, as the possession of true virtue, and that, having received so many graces by the liberality of Heaven, you have received nothing in this promotion, but the means of letting those graces shine before the eyes of the Church of and the world.*

*I therefore repeat the congratulations I have already had the honour of addressing to you in private, and in offering you this work, I take the opportunity of making public my delight in a promotion on which Rome congratulates herself*



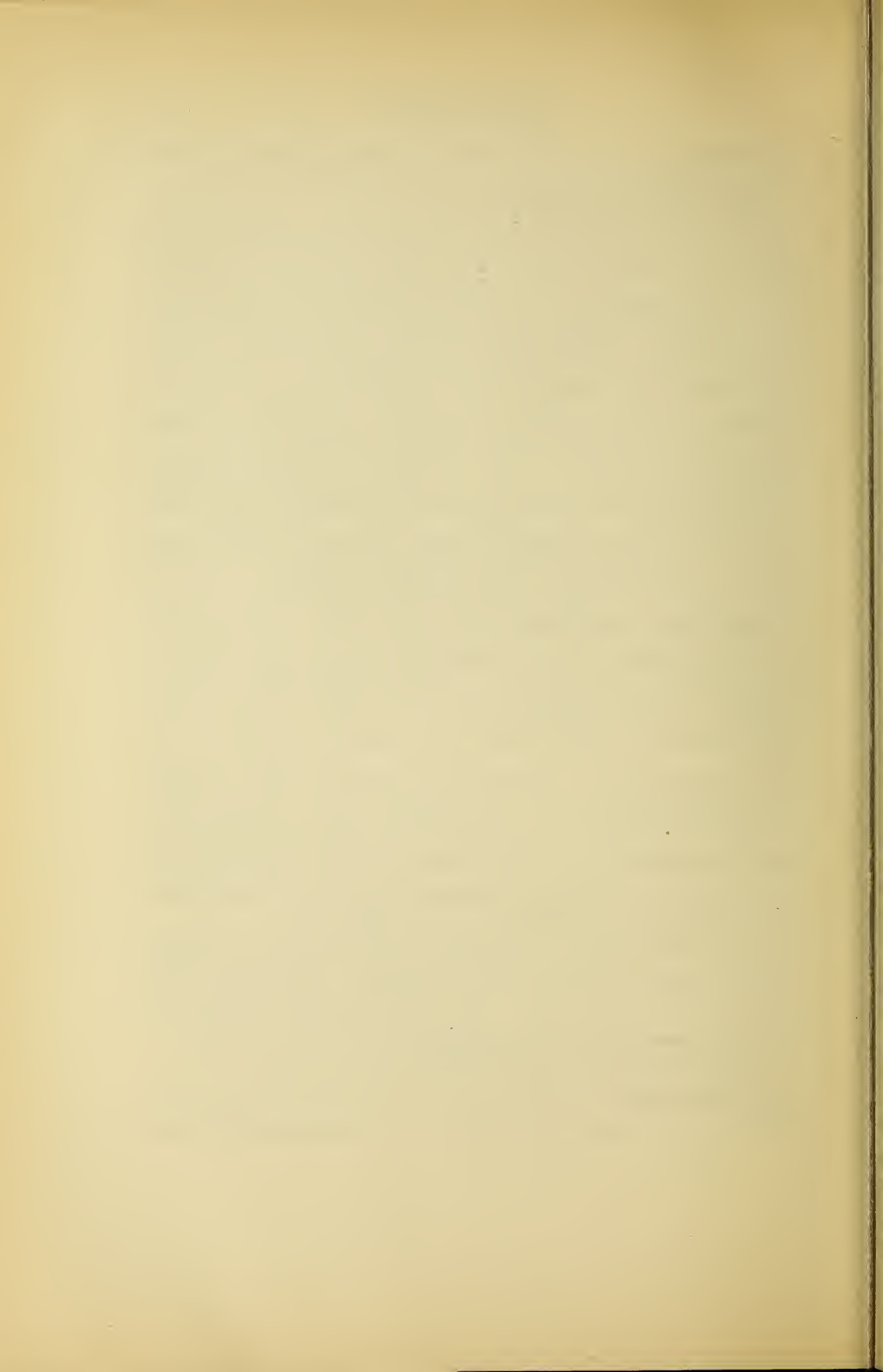
so heartily and in which all men of good will have such cause for rejoicing.

But, *MONSEIGNEUR*, in dedicating to you the second part of this Treatise it seems to me that the first part will receive new life, and that, even although many impressions have been made of it, it will not be able to accompany the other without taking a large share in the favourable welcome which I trust you will accord it. The perfume of your prayers will, doubtless, communicate to this work that good odour of Heaven, which its author is powerless to give it, and those who take the trouble to read it will gather more fruit from your blessing than from my work. All the consolation which I on my part can hope for in publishing this little work is that I at least offer my readers a good subject, of which Grace will be the form, and that, wishing to testify to God my gratitude for the exterior darkness with which He has covered my eyes almost since the beginning of my life, I present to the world that darkness which will allow it to see the light of God, that holy and precious darkness which is the veil of the Divine, and which God puts into the world in order that those who cannot see may be able to see, and that those who see may become blind, it being only too true that such darkness is the obscurity of some and the light of others. Nevertheless, *MONSEIGNEUR*, I pray the God of lights that He may give you abundantly that sovereign clarity with which He illumines those who do not ask to see everything, but who study to humble their reason before the abyss of Faith.

I pray that He may long cause you to shine forth for His Glory and for the good of His Church. I ask this of Him with all my heart, and I remain, *MONSEIGNEUR*, with the most profound respect possible to me,

Your Eminence's very humble, very obedient, and very grateful servant,

François Malaval.



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

SOME time ago, wishing to collect the lights which I had drawn here and there from my reflections and reading on the subject of contemplation, I wrote a Latin Treatise which I entitled, in a well understood sense, *The Prayer of Quiet*. This little work was favourably received by persons who in this branch of knowledge have more learning and sufficiency than myself, and who by their signal devotion have brought down the greatest lights of Heaven to illumine the things of God. But as I had written from the standpoint of scholastic Theology, and could thus only be of use to very few persons, I was immediately asked to make the subject more familiar, and to treat of it in our own language, so that it might be more generally useful, and better understood. I replied that not having written save for myself alone, and regarding nothing in my work as of any value save that with which God might have inspired me, I never dreamt of producing anything on my part, and only thought of instructing myself. But the requests of these persons were stronger than my reasons, and I have consented to treat in French that which I had treated in Latin without publishing it.

At the same time this is not merely a translation of my former work; it is another work, entirely different, both in reasoning and matter. And God having had the goodness to spur my laziness, and to put strongly before my eyes the counsel I had been given of writing a second time on this subject, I abandon myself with all my heart



to His lights and His guidance, not wishing anything of Him save by Him and for love of Him. I wish to teach the practice of Contemplation which tends to knowledge of God and union with God by means of faith, and to explain its nature and its properties in so clear a way that I need ask nothing of those into whose hands this book may fall, other than a little reason, common sense enough to understand these lessons, and a little goodwill to practise them, if they are faithful to their *attrait*.

I thought I could not better arrive at the clearness I wish to preserve throughout than by writing in the form of a Dialogue, because of all ways of treating a subject, this seems to me the most familiar, and that which accommodates itself the most to every sort of spirit.

I pray God He may enlighten me by His grace in so obscure and so difficult a path, and that He may deign to disclose to my reader that of which I may be ignorant myself. Such will doubtless come to pass if this teaching is embraced with ardour and devotion, there being nothing which better discloses to a soul the inexhaustible treasures of contemplation, than contemplation itself.

But it is necessary to reply to certain objections which may be made against this little work. Those who are well read in mystical writers may, perhaps, object that I have treated this subject in too familiar a way. But I reply to them that the Church, like a good mother, uses simple and familiar language with her well-beloved children and that she sometimes displays her greatest treasures in the simplest words and barest literal simplicity. Such is the true language of her Master and Bridegroom, the language He speaks in Holy Scripture and in the sacred Gospel where the parables of the fig-tree, of the mustard-seed, of leaven, of a boat and of fishermen, carry more light and blessing to a humble reader, than many argu-

ments inflated with all the pomp of reason, will carry profit to a curious and proud reader.

Others may say that all devout women will wish to follow this way of prayer, seeing it treated so familiarly and believing they will be able to practise it at once and with ease. I reply that I do not write save for those capable of interior things, well mortified in the exterior senses and passions, greatly attracted by God to His Pure Love, and thoroughly detached from all creatures; and that it would be necessary to burn many good books if one wanted to prevent their being read by those who were not disposed to enter into the sense in which their authors wrote them. That is an old charge which has often been levelled at those who have written of these mystical matters; it is not worth my while to waste time over it. I will only declare that the soul must be thoroughly detached from its senses and its passions by a particular grace of God, in order to embrace contemplation, a state in which the soul is above both senses and passions.

I must also insist that if I here prescribe a method for a prayer which is a pure gift from God when it has arrived at the supernatural, and which is a very great gift, even if it goes no further than to act as a simple support of faith, the method I prescribe tends only to avert hindrances. For even although the grace of God which sanctifies us, is the most sublime gift He can bestow upon us, and while it recognizes nothing but the glory above it, we do not cease to prescribe methods, prayers, considerations, and penances not as natural causes of grace, but as instruments befitting to our weakness, to keep the human heart in fervour, and to empty it of everything which is not God. Add to this, that of necessity grace enters into every method which a good intention can propose to us, and when the latter disposes and determines us to some special course, grace



then forces us to pay heed to that which we had attempted to discover. I have further marked the signs which one ought to recognize in souls before leading them to contemplation. May those who have none of those signs not pretend to have them, and may they leave those who do indeed possess them in peace.

In exchange I will enlighten many of those whom God Himself attracts into these ways of the spirit and I pray for the blessing of Heaven which alone can give value to my words. I will try to shed some light on the difficulties in which most of those who attempt contemplation find themselves; to show some how to recognize the signs of contemplation in themselves, and others how to manage themselves when they pass from meditation to contemplation. Some I will show how to explain to their Directors, in spite of their powerlessness to express themselves, a certain solid foundation of faith, and consciousness of the presence of God which they feel in themselves without discerning it, and which does not consist either in images or in terms or in reasons, or in distinct affections of the will. There are souls who weep for joy to find their state simply explained, seeing that they had before regarded it with scruple or inquietude, because it was so abstract and drawn away from sensible devotion and the ordinary way of prayer; which they held to be suspicious.

Many authors in all languages have treated of contemplation, but there is generally some drawback in their manner of treating it. Some of them could only be intelligible to learned men in spite of the fact that the most humble and ignorant are often called to the highest contemplation. Others, certainly, have written more familiarly of this matter than the first, but not contenting themselves with contemplation alone, they have mixed up other subjects with it, so that in making some souls curious and

in confusing others, they have led to the result that their readers have not applied themselves sufficiently to that which should have been their chief aim. Some having consulted good souls who did not know how to explain themselves sufficiently, and who had received from our Lord Jesus Christ, with the gift of contemplation, supernatural impressions of His Cross, or particular applications to His different states of interior suffering, or equally supernatural knowledge of His Divine Perfections, have thought on the testimony of such souls, that contemplation must necessarily be accompanied by considerations, applications, and similar acts.<sup>1</sup> And they have confused the effects and favours which follow contemplation with contemplation itself. It is those very souls who have appeared the most wilful because they have taken many saints as their examples, taking for their meditations and practices the knowledge and sentiments of St. Francis, St. Bonaventura, St. Bernard, and many other great contemplatives; although the fullness of their hearts in these matters sprang from an infused plenitude which discharged itself through their pens as through so many canals, and not from a mass of pious considerations obtained by way of ordinary meditation.

Moreover, when God, considered in Himself as God by the pure lights of faith, above all reason and sentiment, applies Himself to the soul in contemplation—as He comprehends everything in Himself, He gives everything in that one act; so that in this path practices and cognizances are not the means of contemplation but the fruits and favours of it. We read in the Book of Wisdom, *Venerunt mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa*: Every good thing has come to me with this wisdom; that is to say, all

<sup>1</sup> The reference here is to a type of devotion greatly favoured by seventeenth-century spirituality.



the fruits of grace, which consist in the lights, gifts and sentiments with which the saints were filled. Nevertheless, those authors having written of contemplation in men who were merely wise and pious, and not in men who had often tasted the Divine, clothed contemplation with their own particular sentiments and lights, founding their works on the examples of the saints interpreted in a literal and rigorous way.

It naturally followed that others, treating this matter like other theological matters, made it subject to opinion; they wrote what they thought, giving, in this case, good and holy practices, but not the true idea of contemplation, which is an act of great purity in which God is regarded as God, a fact I cannot sufficiently repeat. And it is precisely of such writers that we might complain that they have treated contemplation by far-fetched and studied methods.

I do not speak here of those other writers who have introduced an idle suspension of the understanding and the powers of the soul, or violent efforts to become brute or statue under pretext of purifying the soul and reducing it, as they say, to its first state. St. Teresa complains of such people in some part of her *Life*. Others say that there are too many books of this sort of spirituality, that our forefathers did not walk so circumspectly as we do, and that the main road is always the safest. I reply to their first objection that there are not so many good books on this subject as they imagine, seeing that one cannot count among this number those written without experience and only through vain imitation, which, by whatever knowledge it may be accompanied, confounds and obscures the truth. I reply to the second objection that the matter is utterly contrary to what such objectors think. Our forefathers (if by that term we mean the early Christians),

did not cumber themselves with so many methods, or meditations as we do, as is clearly to be seen in the earliest Rules of the Orders and in the lives of the Fathers. I would also reply that that which is to-day called the main road, consists of a great number of vocal prayers and a whole year of different meditations; and if these are not accompanied by interior mortification then they leave persons of devotion more lukewarm after thirty years' practice of them, than they were at the beginning. On the other hand, if mortification goes hand in hand with meditation, then it is no longer the main road; it is the straight and narrow path. An infinity of really mortified souls would naturally pass on to contemplation if they were not turned aside by the ignorance of some, the vain wisdom of others, and the special attachments of persons of piety. For such souls espousing their own particular devotions with more fervour than the love of God for which they were created, and occupying their whole spirits with a certain number of vocal prayers, good though they may be, speak to God, but never listen to Him. It also happens that many are never introduced to contemplation because they find no guide to lead them to it, and God does not always wish to work miracles. That is why no one must neglect such opportunities as do occur, to embrace or to cultivate this hidden treasure.

But what are we to say to another sort of persons who imagine that Mysticism is a new doctrine, not practised in the first centuries, alleging that there were then no special treatises on the subject as there are to-day—notably in recent years in this kingdom of France? I would ask such persons to consider that the Church grows daily in wisdom and lights; that it continues to receive the old lights with added clearness and that it also receives new lights. Controversy was never more utterly put to rout,

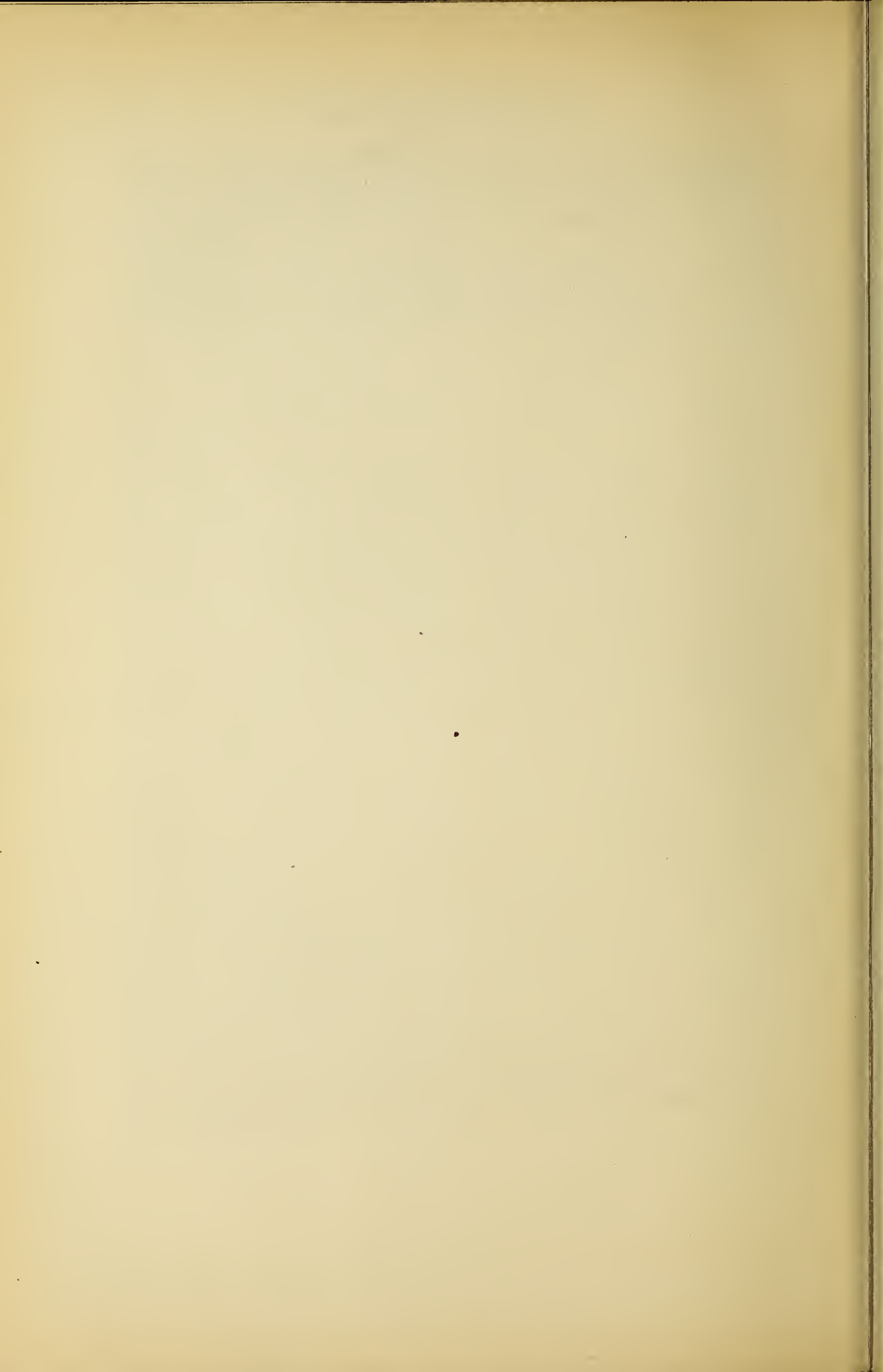
sacred history never more enlightened, the Scriptures never more learnedly and universally explained, Christian truths never brought into more open daylight, than they are to-day.

For more than a thousand years neither an ordered Theology nor a body of Canon Law had been achieved, any more than methodical and solid treatises of devotion and Christian perfection. None the less, how many holy and wise persons shone forth in these faculties, without the fools and knaves of the doctrine having been able to discredit its purity, any more than the frequent and pernicious heresies have discredited the infallible truth of our dogmas. Our forefathers ignored none of these matters; but they had not the good fortune we have had of seeing them either reformed or elucidated as we have seen them, because a long lapse of years has produced long experience, different feelings, different lights, and we come as rich inheritors to reap the fields our forefathers sowed and cultivated by the sweat of their brows. Whether there were more saints then than there are now, this is not the place to decide. It is certain that God has hidden treasure in all times, and it is neither necessary nor expedient that all saints should become famous or work miracles. There are critical minds in Christendom who, while deploring the abuses of the time, and the corruption of morals as it is right they should be deplored, yet do not sufficiently remind themselves of the evils of former days, resembling in this the Prophet Elias, whose fervour, I well believe, they imitate. For he trembled before God because he thought he was the only spirit who adored Him in the whole of Israel. And yet God led him to see that there were still five thousand among his people who had never bent their knees before the idol of Baal.



I beg my reader to accept this little work, and I assure him that when I point him to a way which has been opened up from the beginning, by Heaven and by men, I do not fail to value other ways of devotion which both Heaven and men have taught, exhorting each one not to go before grace by useless industry, but also not to abandon it when it calls him.





## FIRST TREATISE

*After what manner contemplation and the knowledge of God  
should be learned.*

*Philothea.* Your absence has been so prolonged, Father, that it has given me time to collect many difficulties whether from my own experience or from that of those who have spoken to me about my method of prayer. I am very anxious to enlighten myself.

*Director.* It is a grace, Philothea, to have doubts and difficulties at the beginning, as to this method of prayer. God seems to make these problems arise in the spirit in order that He may Himself answer them by effectual interior response. And so He instructs the spirit fully in all that even the great Doctors of Mysticism would not know how to instruct it on this matter, being at once the Bridegroom and the Master of such chosen souls. I have known some who, after having faithfully abandoned themselves to the Spirit of God, received so many graces and lights that they hardly ever read spiritual books or consulted masters of the spiritual life again except to confirm them in their way; they did not learn anything new from such books or teachers, but only assured themselves that they were not being led astray when they followed their inspirations.<sup>1</sup> And so you, too, will now be more free, more detached and more content than you have ever been.

*Philothea.* Ah! Father! you make me weep for joy in

<sup>1</sup> The whole of this passage is repeated at the opening of the Second Treatise (p. 68) where it really belongs. It seems to have been placed here in the edition of 1670 by a printer's error and occupies the first two pages of the text. The true beginning of the First Treatise therefore appears to be lost.

promising me so happy a state. I have never obeyed you save with many imperfections and many infidelities; and that I have been able to obey you at all is a pure gift from God, who rewards your trouble rather than my obedience.

*Director.* The Holy Spirit inspires whom He pleases and when He pleases. He has given me the desire to teach you in this matter and you the desire to learn from me. He gives us both grace to acquit ourselves well of our obligations.

But, Philothea, though according to the precept I have given you, you approach the Blessed Sacrament before consulting me, and though I do the same before speaking to you, let us both now put ourselves in the presence of God for the space of an Ave Maria, without saying a word in our spirits, or by our lips, but only with the intention of listening inwardly so that He may say to our hearts what He will and that He may bless our intercourse. Let us be silent then, in spirit as in voice. Let us listen to God . . .

\* \* \* \*

It is enough. Well! have you done as I suggested?

*Philothea.* Yes, Father. I put myself before God without saying anything, without thinking of anything.

*Director.* But in good faith, did you really think of nothing?

*Philothea.* Some trifling thoughts may indeed have passed through my mind, but I was not disturbed by them. I held my spirit in silence as far as I could.

*Director.* Then, Philothea, you have unconsciously made the first step in contemplation. For the first disposition of a soul desirous of contemplation is a true desire to listen to God by making all its own thoughts, affections, and words to cease. Till to-day, Philothea, you have willingly

listened to preachers, directors, spiritual writers, and all those who spoke to you on behalf of God. But now it is a question of listening, more earnestly than ever, in the depths of the soul, to God, who will speak to you more gently, more effectually, more intelligibly, more frequently than all those who have ever spoken to you on His behalf. I say more gently, because God, who has created the soul, and who is Himself pure Spirit, knows better than any one else can know, how to speak to the spirit, which is, in effect, to act upon it without tumult, without trouble, without agitation, but with solid peace and profound tranquillity. I say more effectually, because creatures who speak to us, often do not know our real dispositions, and say things to us, which while good in themselves are, for us at least, useless. But God imparts the lights. He knows we require them; He imparts them at the right time and in the right way, and He makes it possible for us to receive them whenever He offers them to us, which is not within the power of creatures. God is a gardener who knows when to sow, when to water, when to pluck out the weeds, and when it is time to gather the flowers or fruit. Men scatter the seed of Heaven at large so that he who will may take it. But God, when He sows, never sows wastefully. He even makes the earth hungry to receive the seed, and that even when it is not prepared for it. I say also that God will speak to you more intelligibly because He knows best how to temper the lights to your capacity, and more than that, He will strengthen your eyes, so that you will be able to bear a greater clearness. I say, finally, that God will speak to you more frequently in contemplation, if you will only listen to Him more frequently than you have done in the past, for the more we listen, the more He takes pleasure in speaking to us.



*Philothea.* Will it then no longer be necessary to listen to sermons or to read spiritual books? Will it not be necessary to receive good thoughts and good inspirations from others?

*Director.* I will answer each of these questions separately, but here is the general rule you should keep. When you formerly engaged in some spiritual exercise which furnished matter for thought and which really inspired you, you welcomed such thoughts and inspirations as fitted to teach you to know and to love God; they gave rise to continual reasonings and reflections on the part of the understanding, to high resolutions and good intentions on the part of the will. You must now act in a different way, for when thoughts or affections which can raise you to God now present themselves to your spirit, you must receive them as a simple disposition to recollection and not as matter to occupy your mind. That is to say, that as soon as the thought or the affection has once entered your soul, you must leave it there, and rest in God alone, without further recourse to the understanding or the will or the memory, as if in fact you had none of those.

*Philothea.* All that is very difficult and I would require some examples in order to understand it.

*Director.* I am just about to give you examples, and you will not find so much difficulty as you imagine. Suppose, then, that a sermon or a lecture or a conversation or something of the sort has given rise in you to this thought: "What *power* God has, to have created heaven and earth!" As soon as this thought is formed, there is no need to talk of it, nor to meditate on it; you must at once cast a loving glance at God, here present. He, being everywhere, is also, in consequence, in your soul. Keep this simple regard of God as long as possible, thinking of nothing, desiring nothing during that time, seeing that

having God you have all things. For, Philothea, if you were to make the most beautiful reflections in the world, on the power of God, on the Creator of Heaven and earth, and if you knew in your prayer all that the Doctors and Fathers of the Church have ever known on this subject, what, I ask you, could all that amount to, in comparison with seeing God in Himself? Is not God greater than power, than heaven or earth, than all the thoughts of men?

I ask you which would be the wisest and best advised of two maidens whom a king sent for to speak to him, in order to tell them all the secrets of his heart; she who, passing swiftly through the corridors and state apartments of the palace, without looking carefully at anything, but only seeing what she could as she hurried by, went straight to the king's own apartments? Or she who, admiring the beauties of the palace, the marbles, the paintings, the tapestries, praised the magnificence of the king's possessions in each corridor and apartment, but never came to the king himself?

*Philothea.* There can be no doubt that the first of those two maidens had more understanding and wisdom than the second; it would be a much greater honour to see the king than to see his palace, even were it an enchanted palace.

*Director.* But further, what would you say if this king, wishing to marry the second of those two maidens, sent her an eloquent letter in which he wrote of the beauty and virtue he had recognized in her, assuring her of his love and protesting in the kindest way that she had made a complete conquest of his heart, and that it only depended on herself whether she would have him for her bridegroom?

And further, what would you think if, in spite of all that, this fortunate maiden could toy incontinently with so glorious an offer, amusing herself by considering the king's

letter, remembering its words and figures of speech, weighing the delicacy of its sentiments, and the dignity of its thoughts, and finally making public in every place, and on every occasion, the love with which the king had honoured her? And all this without ever going to see him?

*Philothea.* Such a maiden would render herself utterly unworthy of her good fortune. Did she not call down on herself the anger of the king, she would at least never deserve his caresses.

*Director.* That is well said. But suppose, further, that regretting her delay, she finally went to the king. Do you imagine that instead of looking with respect and affection at this monarch who was to constitute all her happiness, and who had had the goodness to wait for her so long, she would cast her eyes first on the gorgeous robes in which he was clothed, then on his crown and his sceptre, but never on his face?

*Philothea.* I could not think much of her judgment, for in this action she would show that she cared more for the king's robes and ornaments than for the king himself.

*Director.* But suppose that this time also she recovered herself and seemed to desire nothing but the king. That giving way to her feelings she kissed his feet and his knees, and laid her hands on his, accompanying all these actions with loving words and passionate gestures which clearly expressed the love she felt within. And yet suppose that the king, seeing her do all this, had not a chance to say one single word because she was incessantly embracing and speaking to him. What would you think of that, Philothea?

*Philothea.* Such behaviour would be uncouth and importunate and would be more supportable in the



simplicity of a child than in the years of discretion of a maiden old enough to marry the king.

*Director.* Well, that is the whole parable. I will now explain it to you clearly and in few words. This king is God who wishes to espouse our souls even in this life, and to be one with them through a very close and very perfect love. His royal palace is the universe, composed of heaven and earth which he created with one word. This palace, therefore, is not God; however beautiful, however perfect it may be, He could create one infinitely more beautiful, more perfect. And apart from considerations of this world which are a mere nothing, the universe cannot be our beatitude. Make as many excellent reflections as you like on stars, animals, plants, precious stones, and every other part of nature; have even a profound knowledge of man, who resembles the world on a small scale and is the epitome of the world, and the being for whom it was created. All such reasonings are capable of leading you to God, but neither the world nor your reasonings are God. If your soul is too much occupied with the creature, even should this be in a sanctified way, it is impossible for it to enjoy the Creator.

*Philothea.* Of what use then are all the meditations one makes on the works of nature, and on the marvels of grace?

*Director.* They serve to lead the soul up to God and to inflame it with His love. But when the soul feels itself raised up and irradiated, then it is time for it to rest in God alone, who is the term of its thoughts and its ardours. If you should climb up a high tower by a ladder, when you arrived at the top of the tower, you would not drag the ladder up after you. You mount up to God at one period of your life by the ladder of meditation, but then you must leave the ladder and possess God



by resting lovingly in Him. When we blow up the fire, we blow till it is well alight, then we stop blowing, or else we do not give the flame a chance to catch the wood, sometimes we even incur the danger of blowing it out. Considerations and affections are like a favourable wind which fans the flame of the love of God in the soul; this love being once lighted must be allowed unrestrainedly and with a lively faith to leap upwards to God, who will achieve its purification and inflame it with His divine ardours.

Suppose that an artist made you a present of a beautiful picture of the sun, in which he had employed all the resources of his art so that you could not tear your eyes away from it, so greatly were you ravished by the beauty of colour, the boldness of technique, the genius of composition, and all its other beauties; yet I am quite sure that if you were very cold, your picture of the sun would not warm you, nor, when you wanted to see or to walk somewhere, would it furnish you with light. You would have to go to the sun itself, the subject of your picture, and not be content with an inanimate and opaque canvas.

This world is a beautiful and impressive picture of the Divine, but it is from ceaselessly regarding the original that we draw our heat and light. The more we look at Him, the more He imprints Himself on our souls, the more He makes us like Himself; and it is in that that our perfection consists. You see from this, Philothea, that your soul must be like a clear and polished mirror in which God can reflect Himself at His pleasure. And just as he who would paint or gild the glass of a mirror would destroy its brightness and its transparency so that it could no longer reflect things, except perhaps very dimly, in the same way when a soul fills itself continually with conversations and distractions it cannot perfectly reflect

that pure and living likeness of God with which He had intended to fill and adorn it. You must recall the general rule I once laid down to you, Philothea, not in future to reason in prayer, but to take only a very simple Christian truth to raise you, as the Catechism teaches, to God. Then hold yourself in His presence and He will be your Teacher and Master.

*Philothea.* I think I understand the truth you are trying to teach me; that all our own reasoning is weak, all our own fervour full of inconstancy and self-love. The only wise course is to abandon ourselves to God, who will show us clearly how to give ourselves up utterly to a strong and veritable love. But supposing the soul should still require some truth to raise it to contemplation, what truth should it choose?

*Director.* You already know the facts of your creation, Philothea, and some particulars of the life of Jesus Christ and of His Passion. Take whatsoever truth you prefer, without attaching yourself to any special order as you did in your meditations, for otherwise you would run the risk of binding yourself to something, whereas the point now is to enter into perfect liberty of heart and spirit, to see nothing but God, to love nothing but God, no longer to do anything except for God, and in the presence of God.

Take, for instance, some article of the Apostles' Creed. Say, "My God! I rejoice that Thou art Almighty, and that Thou hast created heaven and earth. Yea, my God, I rejoice, but above all because Thou art God!" Repeat the same article two or three times if necessary, to recollect yourself better, for except for that, you will not think of it again during the rest of your prayer. Presently you can say, taking the second article:

"O Jesus! I rejoice that Thou art the Only Son of the

Eternal Father, that Thou art as wise as He is, as powerful as He is, as good and perfect as He is, and His equal in all things. I desire to belong utterly to Thee and utterly to Thy Father."

At another time you say:

"O Jesus! Thou wast conceived for love of me. For nine months Thou wast veiled in the flesh of Thy holy mother. What goodness! What love! May endless thanks be rendered unto Thee in time and in eternity."

Thus you may follow all the articles of the Apostles' Creed, in their right order or not, just as you please. The Lord's Prayer also is a treasury of thought for raising the soul:

*Our Father which art in Heaven.* Yea, my God! Thou art my Father, my Creator, my Saviour, my King, my Judge, my All!

*Hallowed be Thy Name.* O my God! mayst Thou be known and adored and loved in heaven as on earth. Why, O my God, does one speak of anything but Thee? Why does one think of anything but Thee? Why does one wish for anything but Thee alone? Seeing that in Thee is every good and every perfect thing.

*Thy Kingdom come.* My God! do Thou reign wholly in me. I will make Thee Lord over my words, my thoughts, my will; Lord of all I am, and all that I can be.

And you can do the same with the Commandments. That, for example, which forbids taking the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

My God! not only do I not wish to take Thy Name in vain, I make a firm resolve never to utter the sacred names of God or of Jesus save with marks of love and of respect, never to use them in any profane manner. My God! I bless Thee for all those who have never blasphemed Thee, who will never blaspheme Thee on earth or in hell.



*Thou shalt not kill.* That commandment is not enough, O God! I long to suffer all the indignities and all the injuries in the world for Thee. And so on, Philothea, with all the other commandments.

*Philothea.* Indeed, Father, till to-day I have never said the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Commandments, except very dryly and almost without feeling. You teach me thus an excellent way to raise my soul to God by the most beautiful truths of Christianity without seeking far afield. The method is short and simple, even should one have little love of God.

*Director.* You can, of course, extend this practice to everything you know of God and of Jesus Christ. It consists only in representing to yourself the truths you know, and drawing from them a movement of love or joy or compunction, according to the subject with which it deals; contenting yourself with a simple aspiration in the manner described, to rest at once on God who is the source of all truth.

If such an aspiration, repeated two or three times, does not suffice to recollect your spirit, sometimes say the Lord's Prayer or the Creed or the Commandments in French and with the utmost fervour. Or else read, in your devotions, a chapter of the *Imitation*, a meditation of St. Augustine, something which moves the will rather than the understanding, always observing this rule inviolably, that whenever you feel yourself recollected, stop your aspiration or your reading at once, and aim at nothing but keeping yourself closely united with God. For if the sweetness of the matter should carry you away, it would prove that you valued the means more than the end, and that you had stopped your Bridegroom at the door, when He desired nothing so much as to come in and find a soul emptied of every other thing. When you have

become stronger in this way, and have acquired some facility in recollecting yourself, there will no longer be need of considerations or of reading; it will suffice for you to say: "My God! nothing but Thee," or, "My God! Thou art all mine and I am all Thine!" or "O Goodness! fill me with Thyself! O Almighty God, sustain me by Thyself! O Wisdom of God, be here and everywhere my one true Light!" Love will supply you with a hundred other aspirations of this kind which will serve as so many impulses to embrace God more closely. But, Philothea, if you are faithful to the grace of God, who never fails a soul in the state to which He has resolved to raise it, a time will come when, as soon as you kneel down, you will find yourself completely recollected, without need of any outward help. And then, and this must be wisely understood, one *Veni Sancte Spiritus* will be too long for you. You will even find it difficult to make the sign of the Cross, so completely will you be caught up into God and united to Him.

*Philothea.* And what must one do then?

*Director.* Then everything is already done. One must just hold oneself in the presence of God. Formerly you read and prayed in order to recollect yourself, but now, when you know yourself recollected and in repose, it would be to step back, if you still had recourse to such petty preparations.

*Philothea.* Yes, Father, I understand that I must no longer use meditation. But after I have recollected myself, what must I do to put myself in the presence of God and to assure myself that I am doing right?

*Director.* You must remind yourself, Philothea, that the whole world is full of God and that He is everywhere, not only by His grace and His virtue, but also because of His very nature. There is not a single atom on the

earth, not a single drop in all the depths of the seas, not a particle in the air, or a point in the globes of the heavens, where God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is not, whole and complete. He is also complete and entire in animals, plants, minerals, and in all their smallest parts, of which there is an infinity in each one of His creatures. It is, therefore, an article of faith that God is in all things, or to speak more exactly and according to the rigour of theology, that all things are in God; for we do not say that the sea is in the sponge, but we say, on the contrary, that the sponge is in the sea, of which it is full within, without, on every side, and in all its substance.

Consequently, Philothea, God is in yourself, without your seeking Him outside of you. He is in your body and in your soul. And if you could see how God is within you, or rather, how you are in God, you would find yourself so small, so lost in that immensity, that you would, in truth, be filled with fear, and you would recognize how of yourself, you were nothing. What is a drop of water in the ocean? And have you never heard it said that the earth, however vast it may seem to us, is but a speck in regard to the firmament in which it is enclosed, a fact which astronomers demonstrate every day. What are we then, you and I, Philothea, considered in the infinite ocean of the Divine, but nothings endowed with a little life, who would not know how to subsist or to act out of the Divine any more than a fish out of water? What happiness to be always in God, and how little recognized that happiness is! It is a sun which shines on us, and in us, night and day, and we will not deign to open our eyes to look at it. We remain in darkness in the very midst of light, and we are lukewarm and without heat in the very midst of the fire which surrounds us.

Open your eyes, Philothea, by a lively faith that God



is in you, and you will be at once in His presence, for contemplation is nothing but a loving regard fixed on God present. That is why, after you have recollected yourself, you must remain steadfast in this fixed regard without picturing God to yourself like a judge on a tribunal or a king on a throne, for you would be thus merely making imaginary pictures in your mind. Regard Him rather as God Incomprehensible in Himself, above all form or imagination or understanding, who Himself alone can make us know what He is. And to this end say to Him:

“My God! I am here to gaze on nothing but Thee; to desire nothing but Thee, to remind myself of nothing but Thee! Do with me whatsoever pleases Thee; I submit myself utterly to Thy will.”

*Philothea.* Should I say this after I am recollected?

*Director.* It would be a good thing, Philothea, to renew this protest for several days in your prayer, so that you may have something on which to support yourself, and in order that you may not think you have remained in futile idleness in your oratory. If you were courageous it would suffice if you made this act once. But it will all come in good time. I do not wish you to throw yourself suddenly into the sea, and so I give you this piece of cork to support you for a short time. When this time shall have passed, then you will be content in the pure faith of a present God and with the simple intention of abandoning yourself to Him, without producing any new acts.

*Philothea.* But is it not necessary that I should at least remind myself that I am before God?

*Director.* Faith and a good intention have the virtue of producing this reminder; otherwise you might say to this end, “I remember that Thou art in me and I desire to give myself to Thee!” For already as a Christian you

believe that God lives in you and for some days you have been making an inviolable assertion of believing this. And more than that, you have the will to pray, you prepare yourself, recollect yourself, and you no longer desire, as formerly, to meditate on anything but only to contemplate God in Himself. That being so, you can well see that, insensibly and without making any reflection about it, you produce in yourself the thought of God you had asked for. For the simpler this thought or remembrance—without sound of words and without thoughts—the more spiritual it is and the more worthy of God. Would you not be discourteous if, being in the presence of the king, you were to say to him: “Sire! I believe that you are here!” Faith is the eye with which one sees God, and if one firmly believes, then there is no need to say, “My God! Thou art here!” because one knows it. And one never gives better proof of believing it than when one performs some good work, which is the confirmation and fruit of this belief. That is what happens, when, the hour of prayer being come, you betake yourself to contemplate God. For then faith and actual intention of praying both lead you as by the hand to your prayer, and they evoke from you a more solid and admirable act than any you would know how to make of yourself. The reason is that your simple act is one which passes; it ceases to exist as soon as words and thought cease. While faith and intention, on the other hand, by the aid of which you enter prayer, never cease in you, your prayer is as continuous as you wish it to be; and moreover, as I shall teach you presently, it may be made perpetual in virtue of this intention and this faith.

For example, he who has once been baptized does not need to say or to reflect every day, that he is a Christian; he is only obliged to do good works, which are the proofs

of his religion and his faith, and to believe more by results than by words. In the same way the contemplative soul which is once solidly convinced that God dwells very intimately in it and in all its powers, and which has further declared that from that time forth it does not wish to live or to act except for God and in the presence of God; such a soul must be content with its actual faith and intention in all its acts and in all its exercises, without expressly making new acts of belief or assertion.

When in obedience to the command of the Church you hear Mass on Sundays and feast days, you do not make an express act in which you say, "I come to hear Mass in order to obey the laws of the Church"; but in hearing Mass you sufficiently fulfil your duty. After a woman, giving her hand to her husband in the presence of the priest who marries them, has promised him union and fidelity, she does not need to say on every occasion, "I am yours!" but she must express this union by her obedience and by her love. He who signs a company contract with another, does not repeat the articles of the contract when he has to do or decide anything for the good of the company; he acts quite simply, and goes on in good faith with his associates in virtue of their agreement. They may be thirty or forty years together in business without ever mentioning the agreement they signed. They know once and for all that it is recorded by their lawyer, and that they agree in everything.

Trust yourself to God, Philothea; He will remember very well what you believed and what you promised Him. For those who renew the same acts again and again are apt to grow tired of saying to God: "Lord! remember the agreement I entered into with Thee, and do not regard me as a useless creature!" Such people really rely far more on their own acts than on God; they think they are



doing nothing if they do not feel and touch, and they would rather have the slight fervour with which their act may be accompanied, than simple contemplation in which God operates a solid love, which is as far above feelings and tendernesses as the spirit is above the body, grace above nature, faith above reason.

But I do not say that if you were in an extreme lukewarmness, if you were racked by temptations which threw your soul into darkness and mistrust, it would not be wise to have recourse to faith and to refresh your intentions. But be careful, for the scrupulousness of an introspective soul is a very different thing from the necessity of which we have been speaking. Such a necessity is very rare, so much so that so long as you know in your conscience that you are actually persevering in the belief in a present God, and in the pure intention of seeing nothing but Him in all your acts, then you may put your inquietude courageously behind you, and know that the more you abstain from attempting to make an act, and are content to remain abandoned and inactive in simple contemplation, the more will you confirm yourself in your faith and in purity of spirit. For it is enough if you say incessantly and determinedly in yourself, against your dryness and against the evil one, "It suffices me that God is with me. I wish nothing, I seek nothing but Him." In this way every moment of prayer will strengthen you in your purpose, and strip you of your self-love.

*Philothea.* From what you say, Father, it appears to me, that a person who was lazy, or who had even gone to sleep in prayer, might believe falsely that she had made a good contemplation, and justify herself by virtue of her first intention.

*Director.* I touched, imperceptibly, in what I said, on two kinds of intentions. The one deals with the past,

and is nothing but acting or contemplating in virtue of the act of faith one has previously made of believing in a present God, and in the purpose one has formed of seeing Him alone and invariably in all one's actions. Such an intention is called a virtual intention.

The second intention of which I spoke is that extremely subtle and spiritual remembrance of God which holds the soul as it were bound to the object of its desire and its love, without saying, or wishing or loving expressly; it wishes and loves with an exceeding gentleness and a marvellous peace. So much so, that if one asked someone kneeling in her oratory, or even occupied in some other way, but in this sense in the presence of God, "Where is your heart?" she could reply without dissimulation, "My heart is in God! I do not wish to think of anything but Him, nor love anything but Him, and that as much as I am able." She would not say that in virtue of her first intentions, but principally because of her conscious recollection in God, in which she makes an effort to remain as long as her weakness permits. This recollection is called a special intention, in so far as it comprises in itself all the acts of faith, humility, and charity the soul has ever known how to make, though all of those together are not to be compared to this steadfast and lively vision of God, seeing that all other acts are nothing but means, and that in God the soul has happily found the end it sought by all other means.

*Philothea.* But how is one to produce in oneself this vision of God?

*Director.* The vision of God, *Philothea*, will begin to form itself in you from the first two or three days in which you make your affirmation in the way I have shown you. Afterwards, in continuing such prayer, it will grow in you till, by the grace of God, it will become a habit, and you

will be entirely filled with this presence when you desire to contemplate. For each time you give yourself to prayer, you offer yourself with the desire of being united to God; this very desire produces a subtle and tranquil remembrance of God, and then, because of this frequent remembrance, the soul comes to remember Him always, so much so that it is no longer a remembrance, but a continual presence, an act that never passes away.

All this can be best explained by a comparison. When a man is engaged in a certain calling, and when several times a day he sets himself to work, one would not express oneself correctly if one said that such a man reminded himself of his calling, because seeing that he works every day at the same calling, and continues the same activities, they become a habit, rather than a reminder, and it is this habit which awakens the thought of working, and the desire to work, which he does not need to acquire afresh every time. He does not say, "I should like to go to work"; he goes by an almost instinctive movement and without any fresh thought. And when, thereafter, he is at his work, then, in the same way he does not say, "I am working, I am really working at my calling!" Such a thought would be ridiculous, he does not need to do anything but work, and his work will assuredly be done. And so, too, he who gives himself often to contemplation, does not give himself to it by remembering he ought to do so, but by an instinct which urges him to his usual practice. He is conscious of God present at the same time that he is careful to avoid all other thoughts with which his mind might be occupied; he knows that the thought of God alone remains to him, and that it is always there in the depths of his soul even when clouds of distraction or of business have covered it up and prevented it showing itself clearly. It follows that at all times and



in all places, in every society and on every occasion, the soul may enjoy God secretly if it accustoms itself to retire into its own depths and to give to exterior occupations only the attention it cannot refuse them.

It would seem, Philothea, from what we have said, that a lazy person, or one who went to sleep, could not really understand what we mean by contemplation, seeing that a virtual intention is not sufficient, but that a highly exalted intention must be added to it, in order to recognize an experience of God present which is entirely spiritual, without image or figure, an experience which would enable such a soul to reply to any one who might ask what it it was doing, "I am in the presence of God."

*Philothea.* I thank God, Father, that owing to the clearness with which you have explained contemplation to me, you give me an eager desire to embrace it. I long to have at least some experience of it if you will allow me. Let me, at all events, put my little doubts before you in order that I may establish myself better in this teaching.

*Director.* That is only right, Philothea, and, indeed, the best way to learn how to contemplate is to practise contemplation, and from time to time to allow your Director to explain your difficulties to you. But before replying to the difficulties which may have occurred to you in this dialogue, let us follow the allegory of the king and his bride, which I began to explain to you, a little further. You will be better able to understand the rest of it after what I have just told you; the allegory will, indeed, be like a summary of what I have just said.

*Philothea.* I shall be glad to hear it, Father. You have already shown me how the maiden who hurried through the corridors of the palace without stopping to examine them closely, but went straight to the king, represented

the soul who, recollecting itself inwardly after a simple regard of creatures, went straight to God.

*Director.* The letter which the king wrote to her, so brilliant in words, so rich in thought, so profound in light, and so prolific in ardours to inflame his bride, represents the Holy Scriptures, the works of the Fathers of the Church, in a word, all spiritual and mystical books in which God, through the pen of man, has communicated heavenly wisdom to the world, and has written of His love towards His elect. All these books are beautiful, and capable of enlightening and quickening all who read them; but it is quite another matter to bring oneself near to God who is the living source of doctrine, of wisdom and of love. He has only caused these books to be written in order to give us a high sense of His greatness, so that if we love Him in that which has been said about Him, we will love Him more in Himself. Such works tell us marvellous things of God, as do all Holy Scriptures which God has had the goodness to dictate to the authors who have given them to us, as to His faithful secretaries. Nevertheless, they merely touch the surface, they are waylaid by the superficial because God, being incomprehensible to our spirits, is inexplicable in our language, and we drag Him down in attempting to reveal Him.

And even when God has deigned to speak of Himself in Holy Scripture, He has been obliged to use our terms in order that we might understand, and seeing that our terms can only deal with creatures, they set limits to everything they try to express, and to all that they signify. It follows that God, accommodating Himself to our understanding, has not spoken of faith, save by comparisons, and that He has given us His shadow rather than His portrait. For I ask you, Philothea, when God says that He is a consuming Fire, that He is a Sun, a Vine, a Lion,

a Lamb—do you think such expressions worthy of the Majesty of God? When he says that He is higher than the heavens, deeper than hell, greater than the earth, and vaster than the sea, does it not seem as if He were speaking of a great giant, of an enormous body, rather than of infinite Spirit? When he declares that we may see Him in the person of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other Patriarchs or the Scriptural Prophets, is it not a mask He shows us rather than His own face? seeing that even if all men were Seraphim they would only be earth-worms, dust, and nothingness, infinitely far removed from the least perfection of the Divine nature. I say the least in an attempt to express myself, for in God everything is equal. It was in the same sense that St. Augustine said that if all the world were full of books, and all creatures were writers, and all the waters of the sea were turned into ink, all that would not suffice to explain one solitary perfection of God in all its excellencies.

Nothing but God Himself can explain God to the soul; and this He does in an ineffable manner. He who requires neither words, nor human thought, who, without making Himself understood, makes us at least aware that He is incomprehensible, and makes us feel it more vividly and certainly than all the eloquence of human rhetoric. This is a light which springs from faith, or rather it is faith itself, which becomes clearer and more luminous as the soul follows the contemplation I teach you. For, Philothea, if no one but God Himself knows God perfectly, you will agree that no human being can know Him except through the knowledge it pleases Him to give. But it is by faith that He makes us know that which He is, because, having revealed to us that which we believe of Him, He cannot have told us anything about Himself except that which He is in very truth. Thus, seeing that by an act of faith we



say, "I believe that God is infinitely good," we understand more from these few words than all the language of men and angels could express, the more that we rest in God's knowledge of His own goodness, which is incomprehensible save to Him. Thus it is neither the term *good* nor the term *infinitely* which expresses that which we know of the goodness of God; but it is interior faith, supernaturally infused in the souls of all Christians and resting on revelation, which gives weight and authority to those words, and which makes them infinitely significant. The same applies when we say that God is our Father, that He is immovable, that He is eternal, that He is perfect, for a single one of those words proceeding from faith says more of God than if we wrote whole volumes on each one of them.

If we examine these terms apart from the light of faith, we find them clumsy and unworthy of being applied to the Sovereign Majesty of God. The word *good* signifies, in human language, that which is seemly to each nature, and that which may make it desired by another. An apple is good in so far as it has the sweetness suitable to it by its nature, and by this means it excites our appetite to desire it. In the same way the proposition, *God is good*, signifies that the Divine Nature possesses in itself everything befitting it, and that for this reason, all creatures, as far as lies in their power, desire to unite themselves to it as their centre and the source of their happiness. But, after all, when we have said this of God, what more do we know of Him? We have said that He possessed everything befitting His nature, but in spite of that, we neither know His nature nor do we know what befits it. We only form a general and confused idea of the Divine goodness, in accordance with the goodness we know in created things. Just in the same way that when we do

not know and cannot express the sweetness of a fruit someone brings us from the Indies, we say that it is as sweet as honey or as sugar, which does not really explain its true nature, but describes it in the best way we can. We said that all creatures sought to unite themselves to God, and yet we do not know in what manner they tend towards God, except in a general sense, any more than we know the movements or the specific and particular instincts of created beings. So it is very true that we can only speak imperfectly of God; as creatures are far removed from the Creator, so far are our terms removed from the incomprehensible truth of His Essence.

The same feebleness of expression into which we have fallen in speaking of goodness is inevitable, regarding whatsoever attribute of God we wish to think about. To say that God is perfect, is to say that nothing is lacking to Him, and that He possesses in His Being all imaginable perfection. But look at the miserable inadequacy of our reasoning! We say of God, to express His perfection, that nothing is lacking to Him. Now by these words, *nothing is lacking to Him*, we mean that He has all that He ought to have, but that is just where we understand so little of God, for as we do not know what He is, it follows that we cannot know what He has; or else we understand by these words that He lacks nothing of that which we remark in creatures, and so we speak very unworthily of God, for even if there were no world, God would not cease to be all that He is, and if He were to create an infinity of beauties and perfections, He Himself could acquire nothing new. We say that God is all-powerful; but have we any idea what is possible to Him?

In a word, Philothea, the highest knowledge we have of God is feeble and puerile, so much so, that imitating the Church, which says to Him in one of its hymns, *Non*

*horruisti Virginis uterum*, we can say to Him: "Lord! it is only because of Thy extreme goodness that Thou dost not abhor being praised by our poor lips, nor submitting Thy greatness to the feebleness of our words."

But, Philothea, even although we are mere children when it comes to praising God, faith makes up for our unworthiness and powerlessness very fully, and when we say that God is good, that He is perfect, that He is almighty, we must support ourselves on the word of God Himself, which has been revealed to us. We have the honour of speaking of God as God spoke of Himself, because we try to express by our words all that God knows, His mercy, His perfection, His power, and our faith seeks the significance of the terms we offer, in the understanding and in the heart of the Divine.

Contemplation then follows, which, aided by the operation of the Holy Spirit, perfects faith; and just so much as it holds us always in the presence of God, our faith becomes in time so lively and so strong that it almost makes us see and touch that which before we merely believed. We seem no longer to be pilgrims, so intimately and familiarly do we live in the heart of God. What contemplative soul is there who never says *I believe* without some shame and confusion, because faith implies obscurity, repugnance to reason, distance between heaven and earth. He, on the contrary, finds himself enlightened, at the summit of his spirit (that is to say, Philothea, in the highest and most subtle part of the soul), by an interior light which enables him to look without trembling into the darkness of faith. He is convinced, even although he does not see; and he would rather doubt that he was a man, than doubt a truth of Christianity, because he regards the Principle of all Truth without ceasing, a living, vivifying Principle, which by a reciprocal action, tracing itself and imprinting



itself on his soul, communicates its own lights and sentiments proportionately to him. It follows that the contemplative, without turning as in ordinary meditations, now to the goodness, now to the sanctity, now to the eternity of God, attends to nothing save to keeping his gaze fixed on God alone, and as God comprises everything in Himself, this soul, by an uninterrupted act of faith towards the Divine, comprises in one act all the detailed and particular acts of faith which it could exercise towards other truths.

Therefore, Philothea, if God is incomprehensible and ineffable, if an act of faith says more than all human knowledge, and if contemplation is the most perfect exercise of faith, uniting in one single act all the divine truths,—seeing that this act is to regard God in Himself, He who comprises all things and unites all things in Himself—then neither meditation nor reading are any more required, nothing but a tranquil resting in God by means of a lively faith, esteeming nothing in heaven or earth greater, or more precious, than such possession of God. Such is the only true happiness of which we are capable in this life; some have it more and others less, according as it pleases God to give His grace and establish Himself in the soul.

Philosophers know God; Christians believe in Him; meditative souls consider Him, but the contemplative alone possesses Him because he looks fixedly and invariably at nothing but God Himself.

Here love follows knowledge to achieve our beatitude, and as this knowledge is a gaze fixed on God, and not on His goodness or His power or His wisdom or any other attribute of His perfection, in the same way such love is solely love of God, and not of His goodness or His wisdom or His power, or any other attribute, to the end that the

love may be as pure as simple and as spiritual as the knowledge.

*Philothea.* I long with all my heart for the happiness you have described to me! And while on the one hand it is difficult to acquire this peaceful and tranquil contemplation in which we regard God alone in faith and love, yet it seems to me that when we are once fully resolved to give ourselves up to it, we free ourselves of many things which before may have occupied our spirits and often weighed them down. For, after all, what can one contemplate that is greater than God, seeing that the most perfect creatures are not God, and that the mysteries and Divine perfections are but a part of God, as I gather from what you have said.

*Director.* We read in the Gospel of St. John, Philothea, that St. Philip, having led Nathaniel to Our Lord, he was received by Him with those loving words, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." On which Nathaniel being astonished said to Our Lord, "Whence knowest Thou me?" "Before that Philip called thee," the Saviour of the world replied, "when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." Then Nathaniel answered with profound respect, "Rabbi! Thou art the Son of God! Thou art the King of Israel!" To which Our Saviour replied, "Because I said to thee I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these" (John i, 47-50). I say much the same to you, Philothea, because in these considerations of ours God has allowed you to know interiorly that He saw you under the fig-tree. That is to say that up till now you have only been in the shadow of the tree of life, in considering the roots, the branches, and the leaves without tasting the fruit. You come now to confess like Nathaniel, that God is your Master, and not creatures; that He is God, and

not some perfection or some mystery, and finally, that He is the King of Israel, He alone meriting to reign alone in all the powers of your soul. And because, as I say, you already recognize this truth, I assure you you will experience much greater things. The lowest degree of contemplation to which it may please God to raise you through the exercise of your faith, will bring you substantial lights and true happiness, as if the whole world together conspired to enlighten you and make you happy.

O God! make all men to know how good it is to possess Thee by loving contemplation! But do Thou make this known above all to those many spiritual souls who, misled by their own piety, die of hunger and thirst beside the source of all good and who walk with God without ever looking at Him.

*Philothea.* Should I then, Father, say farewell to all spiritual books and such practices and aspirations as I have been accustomed to use during the day?

*Director.* As for books, you may read sometimes by way of instruction when you need to learn something special concerning your salvation, or your spiritual state, or your way of prayer, and you may sometimes read as occupation, for such good material always serves to drive away foolish thoughts and to maintain the soul in fervour. And you may read at other times to recollect yourself when domestic affairs have seriously distracted your spirit. But from the moment God calls you seriously to contemplation, you should not read any longer, neither to carry some subject for meditation into your prayer, nor in order to emphasize any special point, for in this exercise God alone is your support and your light.

Remember also, when you do read, to interrupt your reading, from time to time, in order to recollect yourself for a moment in God; that will allow God, like a good and



helpful Director, to use the matter you are reading, which you will thus offer Him by this interruption. He will give you the increase with interest, illuminating interiorly, either at that moment, or when you require it, whatever may be obscure in the book you are reading, and perfecting your knowledge by His light in so admirable a way, that instead of remaining in your memory as it used to do, that which you read will pass unconsciously into your will, and you will soon recognize what a wonderful benefit it is to read what one reads with God.

As to practices, and as to the ejaculatory prayers which you have been in the habit of using during the day, I will now only allow you two or three very brief prayers, as if you should say, "Lord! I will never separate myself from Thee!" "Jesus! Be Thou all mine!" and other similar ejaculations. But you will not use them in the way you used to do, for as soon as you are lifted up to God, you will let your spirit fall back on its first thoughts, and you will set it utterly at liberty as if it had nothing more to do. Such ejaculations must now be as means only to help you to recollect yourself in God, and to dwell in Him as much as you can, even in the midst of your most important duties, as I shall explain more fully later on. In the meantime I will continue the explanation of our allegory.

When our imaginary bride stops to consider the purple robe, the crown and sceptre of the king, without ever glancing at his face, she represents a soul, who, being called to the contemplation of the Divine, only considers the humanity of the Saviour of the World (that is the purple in which God has clothed Himself for love of us)—as she does when she meditates on the reign of Jesus Christ in this world and on the glory of His acts (which is what I mean by the sceptre and crown)—without ever regarding His Divinity. Now the aim of the Incarnation

is to make us know God by means of the humanity of the Saviour. Thus, Philothea, the humanity of Jesus Christ is the most holy and perfect way by which to approach God; it is the sovereign instrument of our salvation; it is the connecting link between the Old and the New Testaments; it is the channel through which all the blessings we await must flow to us. But this humanity is not the Sovereign Good, which consists solely in the vision of God. In the same way, everything that the most holy humanity has done or said on earth, carries life and grace into our souls, and leads us excellently and infallibly to God; but when we are in God, which is what we aspire to in considering the Life and Passion of the Saviour, we must not turn back by returning to meditation or to reasoning about His life or His Passion; we must not quit the end for the means. He who has arrived at the end of his journeying and of his desire, no longer thinks of the road by which he has been obliged to travel, even had it been a road paved with marble and porphyry. He relaxes all his efforts and refreshes himself at his ease. He is no longer a pilgrim; he has come to a stopping-place; he remains in that place. If he sometimes thinks of the route by which he has travelled it is to remind himself of it, not to return by it. After we have meditated for many years on the humanity of the Saviour of the world we must finally learn to rest in God to whom this path has led us. And every time we remind ourselves of His holy humanity, we must at once remind ourselves that it is inseparable from the Divinity to which it leads us and unites us, being itself united to it. And thus this simple and holy remembrance leads us back to God, to embrace Him with greater ardour. Jesus Christ, who has suffered so much in His holy humanity for us and who has died for us, must also be our Beloved; and we think often of

Him whom we love. But for those who have passed the stage of meditation in which they exercised themselves to inflame their love; when their love is inflamed they have arrived through grace at pure contemplation, where there are no longer either meditations or reasoned acts. Their remembrance is pure faith and conceives of Jesus Christ, Man and God, in one glance at His spirit, without thought of any kind whatever, except that the Holy Spirit sometimes leads to consideration of the Sacred Humanity by the Divine Will, and not by our own will which no longer acts, nor by our own choice. It is thus a special grace when God wills that a soul should attach itself to the thought of the sufferings of Christ, to have compassion on Him. But if the Holy Spirit leaves us to ourselves and gives us liberty of thought, it seems to us as if we were out of our centre or element, which is God, and that we had, as it were, come out of God, and had strayed, while in fact we have not come out of Him. Then, in this liberty we must set our thoughts on our well-beloved Jesus Christ, embracing Him as Man and God in one simple glance of the spirit, and with some little word of love, but without thought or reflection. For when we thought we had strayed, it was merely into the path into which we must always turn ourselves anew and which leads us at once to God and restores us to God. The soul of the contemplative, walking through the desert of faith, is always supported by its Well-beloved, even when it does not feel His support, and often, indeed, when it does not even think of Him. This is taught us in the Canticle in the words, "How admirable is she who cometh up from the wilderness, covered with delights and leaning on her beloved." But the soul is conscious of His continual support whenever it is free to think and to remember, for it thinks at once of Jesus who dwells in



its depths, and it says to Him in spirit some little words of love, to which it has so accustomed itself that it does not need to think in order to utter them; they come instinctively to its lips. This is no longer accompanied by reasoned meditations on the acts and sufferings of His holy humanity which it no longer distinguishes from His Divinity, for such meditations were means to lead the soul to love, and are no longer needed now that it does love.

*Philothea.* Is there, then, Father, any moment in our lives when we do not need to think of Jesus Christ, seeing that the Church herself, by festivals, Masses, Offices, and in a hundred other ways, refreshes our memories daily?

*Director.* Jesus Christ is greater in His divinity than in His humanity, and so he whose thoughts always tend God-wards, always tends Christ-wards. But more than that, faith, being more alive and more active in the contemplative life, because of the continual presence of God which fortifies it, regards things concerning the life of Christ in a more noble and lofty manner than if it considered them in detail. For example, when the contemplative goes to Mass, he is sure to remind himself that the Mass which he hopes to hear is a representation, or rather a continuation, of the sacrifice which Our Lord offered on the Cross; and here we have a thought of the humanity of Jesus Christ, which, simple though it be, suffices to raise the contemplative soul to God, and he hears Mass in the sight of God as Jesus Christ Himself made His sacrifice in the sight of God. And this is worth infinitely more than all the meditations and prayers we could make on the Mass; because, following the teaching that I have explained to you, the soul which believes by faith that which the Mass represents to it, believes of this august sacrifice all that God knows of it. And in so far as action must follow faith, it is certain

that the soul which professes to believe in this mystery present to it, all that which God knows of it, will also operate and act in this mystery in the most excellent and glorifying way that God wills that it should operate and act. But recognizing its impotence to do anything for God, it naughts itself in His presence, and it is as if it said something like this, albeit it says nothing, "My God! I would have infinite love and infinite humility in order to respond to the excellence of this mystery. And since I am not capable of the excellence of these dispositions, I strip myself gladly of all my acts and all my practices, desiring only to be here in order that I may unite my will with Thine and comport myself in this mystery according to all the knowledge Thou hast of its dignity."

But, Philothea, the soul, as I have told you, does not produce the interior act I have just described in thoughts or in words, but by abolishing all its own acts that it may enter into the simple sight of God; it says more and thinks more of the mystery in this lofty act than all the world together could contrive to think or speak of it. The reason is that as God comprises everything in Himself, the sight which the contemplative soul has of God, supported by faith, comprises everything in itself and is infinitely higher than all other acts. The contemplative does not desire to know anything in his own understanding, nor to love anything in his own love; he desires to understand through the understanding of God and to love through His Divine Love.

The same is true of all the mysteries and festivals of the year, for the mere thought or remembrance of such a mystery or festival suffices to raise the contemplative up to God, engulfing and losing himself in this vision of God so that he remembers nothing save Him who is

above all mysteries; thus he honours the mystery infinitely more than if he made many meditations and prayers on the subject. And then God, wishing to recompense the contemplative's perfect abnegation of his own acts, communicates imperceptibly to him, lights and sentiments of the mystery which has been represented to him; these far surpass all the knowledge and all the movements his own meditation could possibly have furnished him with.

You must know, Philothea, that all the acts and all the words of the Saviour of the world penetrate the soul more efficaciously when it regards them with a simple sight, having first put itself in the presence of God who is concealed in the acts and words of the Saviour. For we must firmly believe that each word and act of Jesus Christ possesses infinite merits which all the efforts of our reason would be powerless to attain; after a simple representation, our silence, which is nothing but a result of the faith to which we subject our understanding, and the living presence of God in sight of whom we wish to be silent—our silence honours an act or word of Our Saviour more than all we could say or think. Thus, when I have set before myself these words of Christ's, *He who is exalted shall be brought low, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted*, I remain in silence looking at God; it is as if I said, "My God! it is Thou Thyself who hast taught me the meaning of these words and who hast given me their fruit. I am not capable of either understanding or practising the truth, but I believe of these words all Thou understandest in them and I hope Thou wilt give me of their meaning, anything fitting for me to have."

If I think of Our Lord fasting in the wilderness, and if on this vision, as on wings, I fly straight to God, it is as if I said (but without saying it), "My God! who but Thou can know the glory of this fast or how much Jesus Christ



suffered in it? Give me grace to imitate it according to my strength. I adore this holy abstinence. I thank Thee, O Jesus, that Thou didst accept it for love of me." In this way, Philothea, as you see, the simple and living presence of God in which you put yourself after considering a word or act of Jesus Christ, comprises all the acts you might be capable of making in detail; acts of faith, hope, and love; workings of grace, of adoration, of humility, and an infinity of others. The reason of that is that you suspend, for the sole presence of God, the working of your understanding, the affections of your will, and the representations of your memory; and in consequence your one eminent act absorbs and contains in virtue and value all that the three faculties of the soul might be capable of producing on the matter, because this act has God for its object. The soul in confiding itself to His wisdom and His operation, and abandoning itself to them with all its might, does something of more value than anything else it could know or do in this matter.

For the simple regard of God perfects and fructifies all the thoughts we can have on good or evil, grace or nature, men or angels, saints or sinners, and on all the things they represent to our spirits. In all of them we can raise ourselves to God by merely representing them to our souls, and then quietly looking at them in the presence of God.

But more than that—and here we come to the end of the allegory—the perfections of God, His goodness, His wisdom, His omnipotence, His eternity, His knowledge, and all His other attributes, do not need to be considered, except in so far as is necessary to raise us up to God Himself. For though in God there is neither more nor less, seeing that the goodness of God is God, the power of God is God, the wisdom of God is God, and each

perfection of God is God, all the same, in so far as our spirit is limited, and can only consider things in a material and general way, it happens that when, for example, our spirit considers the wisdom of God, it cannot think of His goodness, and that when it thinks of His goodness it cannot think of His wisdom, and so it appears to separate God into different parts. While on the contrary, when it regards God in Himself by His simple presence, then it regards Him with all His perfections and not in detail as before. It sees God as He is in Himself and not as He is conceived by us. That is the reason why the contemplative finds afterwards that he has considered the goodness and the power and the wisdom of God, who is the centre of goodness, power, wisdom, and all other perfections. It is thus that the contemplative will attract to himself lights and communications, whether sensible or secret, touching the perfection of the Divine, which will surpass all human considerations, and his knowledge will be accompanied by a sweet savour not to be found in the sterile and laborious subtleties of the human spirit, a savour which is more spiritual, more lofty and more unifying than that produced by the grace of ordinary meditation. The soul, therefore, which aspires to contemplation in no wise resembles the thoughtless bride, who amuses herself by kissing the king's feet and knees, fondling his hands, and overwhelming him with importunate embraces without giving him the opportunity of saying even one word to her. For the feet signify the power and sovereignty of God; the knees His mercy; the hands His magnificence or His justice, and the embraces the thoughts of the creature, accompanied by a tumult of diverse affections which prevent God from acting in the soul with the power with which He wishes to act and which do not create the tranquillity, attention, and silence

which dispose the soul to receive His Divine messages. The bride would gain more from the king, and would lead him to look at her more attentively, by a tranquil and loving regard, than by all these over-eager gestures and ardent words which hinder their union and prevent their tranquillity and peace.

You can gather, Philothea, from all that has been said, that contemplation is not consideration of the works of nature, nor reflection on passages of Holy Scripture or the writings of the Fathers or the lives of the saints or spiritual books, neither is it meditation on the life or death of the Saviour of the World, nor lofty speculation on the attributes of God. Neither is it a variety of reasonings in the understanding, nor a multitude of affections in the will, nor a remembrance of pious ideas stored in the memory, nor a visualizing of the figures of the imagination. You will realize that it is neither tenderness nor sweetness nor feelings, nothing but a simple and loving regard of God present, a regard which rests on the belief that God is everywhere, and that He is everything. For all things of nature and of grace, howsoever perfect they may be, are nothing but means to raise us to God as we consider them in passing, and in so far as we have need of them to recollect ourselves and dissipate the distractions and thoughts which might keep us from His nearer presence.

*Philothea.* I thank God, Father, that I am permitted to understand clearly what you have taught me. What must the happiness of those souls be who taste the joys of recollection and experience God in the depth of their hearts, and enter into His presence whenever it pleases them!

*Director.* Do not say "whenever it pleases them," Philothea. Contemplation is a prayer which has the privilege of being perpetual and of being possible



everywhere. It is, of course, necessary to reserve one or two hours a day during which one can disengage oneself from every other occupation to give oneself up entirely to this holy exercise. But even in the midst of necessary occupations, it is possible to contemplate, more or less attentively, according to the spirit, the temperament and the profession of each one. For as contemplation is nothing but the simple and loving regard of God present by the help of faith, the spirit is occupied neither with thoughts nor reasonings, and it does not lose the liberty of applying itself to that which it is necessary for it to know, nor of considering from time to time the business and the necessities of life. It suffices, therefore, to be conscious of God in the point of the spirit and to be firmly resolved never to lose this consciousness, although it is not necessary to have it always as distinctly present as if one were in one's oratory, away from conversation and interruption.

Is it not the case that the multitude of things which pass before our eyes every moment of the day, never prevent us from seeing light, and that for two reasons: first, because without the help of light we would not be able to see these things; and secondly, because light has not in itself separate or distinct parts which can arrest our eyes and turn them aside to other things? It is just the same with this loving regard of God; it helps us as a sovereign light to see all things with purity and innocence according to the good pleasure of His Divine Majesty, and as, moreover, it consists neither in figures nor in distinct images, it does not prevent us from considering, according to our necessities, the different things which present themselves to us in the business of life.

And there is yet another cause which makes the presence of God compatible with the cares and distractions in

which the world entangles us, and that is that its most precious part resides in the will which has a perpetual desire to be always bound and united to its Well-Beloved. But the will has this quality of its own, that by a single-minded desire it can of itself maintain itself in the act and hold there for a long period the other faculties it dominates, without requiring to repeat its act. When a man begins to walk forward in order to get to a certain place, although every step he takes is voluntary, it is not necessary for him to make an act of will at each step, or to create a new desire by which he would say, "I will go forward." It is rather in virtue of his first desire to go forward that his will perseveres in him, and so he walks forward without saying that he does so, but yet not without willing to do so. More than that, by a single act of the will this man walks, speaks, sees, hears, and makes different actions all at once. And thus, the contemplative, by a simple resolution he makes not to leave the presence of God, keeps himself steadfastly there, whatever he may do, and to whatever employment he may give himself throughout the day; because he has formed, through the grace of his *attrait* and his continual exercises, so strong a habit of producing the gentle and loving act of contemplation, that he makes it almost insensibly in the midst of his occupations and affairs, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, according to the power he has of recollecting himself.

You must note that I do not speak here only of virtual intention, under pretext of which one might let one's spirit wander in perfect liberty; but rather of a remembrance of God which we ought often to feel actually, at all times, and in all places, sometimes more, sometimes less, according as things occupy us and carry us away. That becomes easy by the grace of God, once the habit is

formed, for it entertains a gentle, almost imperceptible, feeling of God present which endures throughout the great trials of the soul, like a little glowing red coal among the cinders, which when we so wish, lights up again and becomes stronger and more active according to the trouble we take to recollect ourselves. And if this feeling is not always equally strong, we must not be disquieted; our souls are limited and cannot look at many different things at the same time or with the same attention. The Saints deplored not being so deeply recollected amid the conversation of men as they were in their solitudes. It suffices that we do not dissipate our soul's energy either by negligence or by over-eagerness in what we do, and that the work with which we are occupied should be done for the glory of God, for our salvation, and for the good of our neighbour; that it should befit our vocation, and that God sends it to us without our seeking it for ourselves either through false zeal or from a secret desire of being noticed or from a desire for exterior consolation. These conditions fulfilled, there is even merit in losing some of this sweet presence which we might procure for ourselves, in order to fulfil more perfectly the duties of our active lives; duties which we cannot evade, and which might be interrupted by too great an attention to the sweetness, which they would never be by the presence of God. Thus there might be self-love in a too eager desire for conscious enjoyment of God's presence.

All the same, we must fortify this presence of faith from time to time by recollection, interrupting our work or conversation or reading for a moment, and we will find that as God had ordained the keeping of the Sabbath Day in the ancient law, in order to release men from their work and make them remember Him (which are the reasons He gave to Moses for this institution), so this praiseworthy



interruption which we will practise from time to time during the course of our work, will relax our spirits and will make God always more present and more intimate. Perfect love is fertile in finding occasions in which to enjoy these precious moments a thousand times a day, in spite of the most engrossing occupations. It will restrain an infinity of idle thoughts, useless curiosities, foolish affections, and inopportune memories, the remembrance of which would continually fill a soul not on its guard, and which would thus remain darkened and confused to such an extent as not to be able even to recognize itself; just as he who walks in the country is prevented from seeing the view when the wind raises clouds of dust.

And finally, love becoming always more enlightened and more desirous of possessing the one object of its love, comes insensibly to discover a notable imperfection of the soul which is the origin of all other imperfections; namely that it is more occupied and encumbered by its pleasures, its cares, and its own particular imaginations than it is by intercourse with, or affairs of, the world. It is not things which trouble us; we trouble ourselves because of them, and our impulses would never carry us beyond reason if we regarded everything reasonably, that is to say, in the light of God. In this way the contemplative will find more time than he expects for remaining in the presence of God, and he will only give the world the remainder of his attention, that part of it which he cannot restrain owing to the infirmity of his nature.

Courage, therefore, Philothea! Enter now into this Paradise and never leave it whatever may happen to you. Open wide your soul to God and be ashamed to fill it with the bagatelles of the world, seeing that nothing but God can truly fill it, and that even if it were filled with all that

God has made, it would always be empty, if it were not full of God Himself who has made everything.

*Philothea.* Father! I desire with all my heart neither to love nor to esteem anything but the possession of God. He who has God has everything, and he who possesses everything without God has nothing. I firmly believe that contemplation is the true way of possessing Him. But in order that I may the sooner acquire so sanctified a way of prayer, tell me, I beg you, what are the hindrances which may stop me on the way and retard my happiness.

*Director.* Everything I have said to you, and everything you may previously have read regarding the mortification of the interior and exterior senses, must be taken for granted in this way of prayer. The more mortified you are, the purer, the more ardent and more tranquil will your contemplation be. But I ask for a disciplined mortification, which must be proportioned to the strength and the condition of each soul, giving you this piece of advice among others, that faithful contemplation, aided by the grace of God, will have more power to mortify you and strip you of yourself, than all the rules you could ever observe. The Spirit of God, when it does truly dwell in us by this constant and loving presence, subdues the flesh, helps us to despise the world, and vanquishes the power of the devil, who makes his greatest assaults on our bodies and our senses.

You will thus find no pleasure in seeing evil or even useless things. You will not willingly hear anything except that which is necessary to your salvation and your state. And, above all, you will mortify your tastes and affections, which are the most usual sources of excess, and which lead to the most violent passions.

On this subject you should consider an important principle, namely that everything in our five bodily senses,

good or bad, small or great, imprints some image or affection on the soul. A rose, for instance, sends an impression of itself into your interior senses and excites you to love it, to take pleasure in looking at it and smelling it. The more beautiful things are, the deeper the impression they make, and the more they seize on the affections. Things one hears produce the same sort of effect; every word leaves its impress on the spirit and arouses one or other of the passions; at one time fear, at another love, at another anger, according to the nature of the matter in question. Taste, smell, and touch exercise interior influence in the same way; in a word, our bodies offer fresh hindrances to our spirits at every moment of our lives. Such being undoubtedly the case, Philothea, think how many times a day you receive, willingly or unwillingly, impressions and impulses. They amount in one single day to a prodigious number. And there result an equal number of blemishes on the soul. I do not go as far as to say *sins*, but the soul is troubled and darkened; its functions languish, its action is enfeebled, its knowledge dimmed, and its sentiments sullied, so that God can only reflect Himself very imperfectly in it, as if in a tarnished mirror.

Here, too, there is something very important to consider; and that is that the diverse ideas the soul receives from outside, mingling together, produce other and new ideas which go on and multiply to infinity. You cannot picture that to yourself better than by recalling one of your dreams, for a dream is nothing but the confusion of different ideas, which being stirred about by the vapours of sleep form those fantastic stories and events we dream of. In the same way the soul, which does not cease to act and work during the day, tends to produce an innumerable variety of pictures from which it derives many inconvenient



distractions, useless thoughts, and ridiculous phantasies. But the soul is troubled above all during the time of prayer, because as we force ourselves to hold it in check, in order that it may not attach itself to any but one sole object, it constantly escapes and wanders away seeking change and variety as being more in keeping with its usual habits and inclinations. But finally, when once thoroughly emptied of creatures, it regards its object, which is God, more fixedly; and being then drawn by His *attrait* it no longer has any desire to run after phantoms, even although it is always inclined to wander to the worldly business in which necessity engages it, and in which it still fills itself incessantly with different impressions.

And therefore, Philothea, in order to prevent this multiplicity, you must have little intercourse with the world and give little attention to worldly things. For then you will not receive too many outward impressions, and such as you may receive will not make such a deep impression on your spirit, and will not have the power to distract it with foolish and useless things. You will then find that you come to enjoy marvellous tranquillity, and that God, finding no hindrance to His dwelling within you, will be your host, your guest, and your sweet and perpetual peace; and that, the more for love of Him you shut the door on the senses and prevent them from coming in to interrupt the intercourse He would have with your soul, the more He will be the light of your eyes, so that you will see everything for Him and in Him; and the more He will be the guardian of your ears to the end that everything you hear will cause you to seek Him and bless Him. And finally, He will have a special care of your senses in order that you may not be sensible of anything save for Him, and that you may not be affected save by that which pleases Him. This same precept will protect

you from sin and from occasions of sin; the world will become indifferent to you when once you have quitted it for the love of God.

*Philothea.* It is very true, as I have always heard it said, that death enters by the windows; the only thing to do, therefore, is to keep them as tightly shut as one can, and stay quietly recollected within.

But, Father, I should be grateful if you could explain to me what the faculties of the soul are which receive and form ideas, so that in distinguishing them I may learn better how to guide them.

*Director.* Imagine, Philothea, that the soul is as if divided into two parts; the one is animal and is called the lower part, the other is reasonable and is called the higher part. The animal or lower part, which is also called the sensitive part, comprises the inward senses and the appetite. There are four inward senses; the first is a common or general sense which is a faculty of the soul, wherein are gathered together all the images which the five senses of our bodies receive, and from this it is called common or general. For you will notice, that after you have seen something, the image of that which you have seen passes into your mind so completely, that after having closed your eyes you do not cease to see within you a true and real representation of that which you have seen. It is the same with that which enters by the hearing, since we still retain the noise and sound of it in the same way in which we heard it. So also scents, savours, cold, heat, dampness, dryness, all leave an impression in the general or common sense after they have passed; here, then, is the first of the inward senses which preserve the images, either useful or useless, of all discourses and all distractions, wherefrom the other inward senses draw their material.

The second inward sense is the imagination or phantasy, which is a faculty of the soul capable of forming new images from those which have been gathered in the general sense; so that drawing from the storehouse of the general sense, a material all ready to its hand, the soul composes from it its phantoms, its phantasies, and its imaginations, which are all really the same thing. For example, you have just seen two men; their images pass through the eyes into the general sense, and at once the imagination, seizing on these two objects, makes from them a hundred more at its own pleasure. It considers that one is old and the other young; that one is dressed in one way, the other in another; that the bearing of the first is more serious than that of the second, and so on. It is not even necessary that the general sense should represent two men to it; for on the subject of one man only, his feet, his hands, his hair, his habits, the imagination will play in a thousand different ways, imagining what it will without effort, almost without attention, and with a natural facility and impetuosity which in one moment fills the soul with a multitude of images.

The third inward sense is judgment; it is a faculty of the soul which judges whether the images of the general sense are good or bad, worthy of love or hatred, and thus seemly or unseemly, whichever it may be. The general sense has received the images of two men; the imagination has compared them together, and judgment decides whether they should be liked or disliked. And here the judgments multiply themselves in proportion to the images.

The fourth inward sense is that of the memory; it is a faculty which retains and preserves all that the general sense has received, all that the imagination has invented, and all that the judgment has judged good or bad. And



that is all that it is necessary for you to know about the inward senses.

The appetite follows the senses, wherefore it is called sensitive; or by spiritual writers, sensuality, the flesh, concupiscence. It is a faculty of the soul which is moved, changed, and troubled by the objects which the inward senses have presented to it. This is why as soon as our imagination has conceived anything, the appetite begins either to desire it, or to flee from it, according as it affects the nature of the creature. The sensitive appetite is twofold: on the one hand, desirous; on the other, irascible. The desirous appetite is a faculty tending to pursue the good which is proper to the creature, and to flee and detest the evil which is contrary to it. It is by this appetite that the creature loves its own kind, and feels an aversion for that which shocks it; it seeks life and flees from death, and, in short, loves all that which serves its subsistence and its pleasure, and detests everything which opposes either of those.

The irascible appetite is a faculty of the soul which attacks the difficulties and resistances it encounters, either in the pursuit of good or in the flight from evil. Each of these appetites has its own passions: which are, as it were, the instruments it makes use of in order to operate. The desirous appetite has six passions: love and hate, desire and repugnance, joy and pain. The irascible appetite has five: hope and despair, fear, rage and anger. And these eleven passions form and compose many others.

But, Philothea, unless the soul is extremely watchful, no image enters the inward senses which does not at once move the appetite, and which does not excite one or other of these eleven passions which we have named, either for good or evil. So many objects, so many movements; as many impressions as are received on the one hand, so

many perturbations will there be on the other, and they will be stronger or weaker according to the nature of the things concerned. From which it follows, as I have told you, that the appetite is called sensual because it is in that part that the soul is sensitive, and that it experiences its likes and dislikes.

And that, Philothea, in few words, is what concerns the lower part of the soul, which is common to us with the rest of the animal world; and in which there would be, strictly speaking, nothing voluntary if the higher part, approving or disapproving of that which takes place in the lower part and consenting to it, did not render good or bad that which is indifferent in itself.

The higher part, therefore, according to which we are free and reasoning men, distinguished from the rest of the animal creation, is dowered with three faculties which are the understanding, the will, and the intellectual memory. The understanding is a faculty which discerns by reasoning the true from the false, and the good from the evil, in so far as this concerns the perfection of man. I say that the understanding discerns by reasoning, differing here from the inward senses, which of themselves only discern the true and the good by gross images, and judge things rather by instinct and impetuosity than by intelligence or reasoning. This is common to all the animal creation and consequently to man, considered in his lower part. I say in the second place, that the understanding discerns and judges in so far as this is in conformity with the perfection of man, in so much as all the objects of the world, without speaking here of their natural goodness and truth, cannot be applied to the good and the end of man save by the reason and will of man. Everything is otherwise indifferent; the objects themselves, as well as the images of them we receive by the senses. Nothing is good or bad



to us save through the choice we make of it. So much so that the understanding, in order to carry things to a legitimate and perfect end, judges them first of all by what they are in their own nature, and then, when that is clearly recognized, it judges what one can do with them of good or evil. Just as a workman, when he has seen that his tool is rightly fashioned, longs at once to make use of it to produce some fair work of his craft. But since the understanding does nothing without the will, it proposes things to the will as it knows them, and then the will approves or rejects them, using its freedom as it pleases.

The will or the reasonable appetite of man is a faculty of the soul which, following upon the knowledge of the understanding, embraces the good and rejects the evil. It is in this faculty alone that man is free, and it is the will alone which makes all the acts of body and soul good or bad according as, by its natural freedom, it directs them to a good or a bad end. The will is the principle of merit or demerit in man; the senses and the other faculties are not capable either of goodness or of malice except by the consent of the will. It follows from this, that when the will cannot operate freely, as in the enraged or as in those asleep, all the actions performed by man are animal and not human, and cannot render him either good or evil.

The intellectual memory is a faculty of the soul which retains and preserves everything the understanding has known, and everything the will has elected, just in the same way that we noted the sensitive memory stored up the products of the senses and the appetites. And this, Philothea, is what concerns the higher part of the soul.

In summing up, then, all this teaching, you see that the outward senses send their images to the inward senses, and that the appetite forms from them its passions and its movements. That then the understanding reasons on



that which happens in the lower part, and the will decides for good or evil. This is why, Philothea, the mortification and training of the soul must first begin in the outward senses, and on the wise management of those senses depends the tranquillity, the perfection, and the free use of all the other faculties of man. If the outward senses do not receive too great a multitude of objects, the inward senses do not form too many images, phantoms, opinions, memories; the desirous and irascible appetites do not produce too many passions; the understanding will not have to reason so much, and finding itself void of creatures will fill itself the more with God. The intellectual memory will not store up too many things to cause continual distraction to the soul. And finally the will, uniting itself to God as to its unique and sovereign Good, will not be always troubled amidst an importunate multitude of diverse things, as to what it ought to choose and what to avoid.

It is not, however, sufficient to mortify the outward senses; the inward senses must be restrained in order that they may not escape on every occasion. We must never give our consent to passions which might mislead us; we check them in mistrusting them. We must abstain from all useless reasoning and from all designs which do not tend to the glory of God and our salvation; for you may rest assured, Philothea, that outside of those two motives, all our actions are nothing but sin and imperfection.

The grace of God is necessary in order to obtain this liberty of soul, but that grace is never lacking to those who ask for it, and especially to those who are called to this exercise of contemplation. Beyond that, here are the two governing principles, which, if faithfully practised, will raise you in a very short time to real contemplation.

(i) Desire nothing but God in all things, and (ii) be always in the presence of God. The first will only leave you very few thoughts, because, the two higher faculties being filled with their object, the one with that which is alone to be loved, the other with that which is sovereignly to be known, which is God, they hold the lower faculties in check and under the control of discipline, not allowing them to stray away to all sorts of diverse things nor to soar after anything they wish. It follows from this, *Philothea*, that few creaturely impressions will enter the soul; that those which do enter will not make much impression because of the little attention paid to them, and that they will not stay there long but will insensibly efface themselves. Finally, as to those old images which you have amassed during the course of your life, being no longer kept alive by your reflections, they will gradually fade from your memory till you remember them only as dreams. There are people to whom the continuous thought of God causes this blessed forgetfulness of every other thing so absolutely, that they have difficulty in remembering even something which they do every day. In such a disposition one forgets relations, friends, learning, business, graces, and sins, regret for the past and anxiety for the future. But God, in His great goodness, gives back to the soul all that it has lost for love of Him. And we remember clearly, when God wills it, things which would only serve to trouble or vex us at other times when God does not wish that we should remember them. Forget everything, *Philothea*, in order to think of nothing but Him who is all, and you will find perfectly in Him all that you had forgotten.

*Philothea.* Ah! Father, had we all the knowledge of the Seraphim, what could we forget that would be worth the thought of God? He will indeed know how to provide

for our necessities when we do not think of them ourselves. Has He not told us that he who loses his soul for love of God will find it? I think He means by that, all the satisfactions of the soul in the inward and outward senses, all the thoughts of the soul, its knowledge, its affections, its sentiments, its memories, in a word, all that is not God. He who loses all that to find God, will lose nothing, but will find God more perfectly.<sup>1</sup> For, after all, He who is wisdom itself, does He not know what it is necessary for us to think and to know for our needs and for our protection? And what does all the rest matter to us? That which we have given to God in base metal He will change for us into gold, and it will be the easier for us to carry. One of the thoughts He will give us will be worth a hundred of these we have given up for love of Him. I even think that as He is infinitely generous, He will repay us an hundredfold. For if He has promised to give life eternal and an hundredfold to him who, for love of God, will give up his field or his house, what graces will He not bestow on him who gives up his understanding and his will? And so far as I understand it, that really means giving up one's whole being. God grant that I may be enabled to practise this abandonment.

But two things give me courage to set out along the way of contemplation: first, that I have a good guide in you; and second, that I have great desire in myself. Yet two other things which are just as necessary, may be wanting in me—diligence and vocation.

*Director.* The grace of vocation will bring diligence with it, Philothea, if you co-operate faithfully. As regards vocation, here are the principal signs of it. The soul

<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of abandonment here set forth by Malaval is not to be suspected as quietistic. It is strictly in harmony with the "purification of memory and understanding" taught by St. John of the Cross in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*.



which is called to contemplation can no longer meditate, or at least only with much difficulty, though the disability does not proceed from bodily indisposition, nor depression, nor want of preparation, nor from want of attention in prayer, nor from laziness (for these five things are to be suspected when we find powerlessness to meditate). Moreover, the soul is aware, amidst the violence it does itself in order to meditate, of an *attrait* of sweetness and devotion which carries it away, breaking as if by force the threads of meditation by which it strives to bind itself, and raising it to a state of peace from which it would wish never to emerge. Such gentle peace may remain with it throughout the day; such a soul would do anything for God though it can no longer find Him in its ordinary exercises of devotion, which, indeed, prevent it from experiencing this gentle peace. Such a soul seeks solitude; conversation no longer pleases it as it used to do; spiritual reading wearies it. Yet this weariness comes from the fact that it experiences interiorly a peace of which ordinary books tell it nothing, and so it finds itself torn between the desire to enjoy, and anxiety about its state, until someone versed in such matters, or some book which Providence puts in its way, explains to it what it is experiencing without recognizing it, thus explaining it to itself. And so it regains its confidence and is filled with eagerness to be more perfectly instructed.

So that if, after being reassured and confirmed in its way of prayer by the spoken words of a director or by reading, a soul proceeds to abandon meditation for contemplation, it can spend one hour, or even two hours, in this way without fatigue and in great tranquillity. There are some who from the very beginning are so much at home in this kind of prayer that it seems as if they had practised it all their lives, and they pass whole years in

the pure and spiritual sweetness of this peace. This kind of prayer is accompanied sometimes by contrition, sometimes by touches of the love of God, sometimes by tears, sometimes by the desire of suffering, sometimes by sudden lights on the mysteries of the Faith, by a profound reverence for the recognized presence of God, by a knowledge of self which brings with it both confusion and confidence; by an esteem of God above all created things, by a distrust of creatures, by a firm resolve to persevere in the way of contemplation; and, finally, by many insights and movements according to the needs which God sees in each one.

But all these acts present themselves to the soul in prayer, without being desired or sought for. They present themselves also out of the times of prayer, above all when the soul is recollected and in the presence of God. But even when the soul does not experience these acts it does not cease to be in contemplation, because contemplation is nothing but a regard fixed on God present; all the rest being nothing but effects and results.

However this may be, the soul always brings back fruits from such prayer; for when need arises, it has now more power to do good and to repulse evil. There is that good habit, for instance, and that difficult virtue which it has acquired almost without effort on its own part. And on the other hand, that vice and that bad habit of which it finds itself suddenly freed without knowing how. Because the Holy Spirit, having become more than formerly the master of the soul, by the abandonment the soul makes to it of its powers and its acts, does what it pleases; its action is no longer impeded by the action of the soul whose own act is apt to be sometimes too soon, sometimes too late, and sometimes contrary to what God wishes to work in it. And yet, Philothea, no one could say that we do not act in such a case. For by our own



desire and in utter lightheartedness, we have abandoned our souls to the action of God almost in the same way that a Religious abandons his will and obedience to his Rule; one cannot say that his will is forced, or that it is dead or useless, because it acts according to his vow, and thus the soul of the contemplative acts according to its most holy resolution. Moreover, the soul co-operates here in receiving voluntarily and without resistance the working of God in it. And, in the third place, it co-operates sufficiently, seeing that in its conduct it puts into practice the lights and counsels it has received during prayer. If some scholar impugns this doctrine in its substance, it is perhaps because he is not conversant with mystical matters, just as we cannot deny that he may not be conversant with scholastic theology and many other things. Or, if he does have some knowledge of mystical matters, then he fears lest such knowledge may harm feeble souls; but he ought to moderate his apprehension, lest wishing to be indulgent to some, he should err in severity to others, lest he should deflect the designs of God, who forbids the first to advance and the second to draw back. Sometimes also, in spite of his lights, such a man has no experience—and experience, according to wise men, is one of the principal keys of this science—or perhaps his mind is taken up by some other interest.

For, after all, this is the doctrine of the Scriptures, and it can be found in many different places, particularly in the *Song of Songs* and the *Book of Wisdom*. It is the doctrine of Dionysius in the *Book of the Divine Names*, in the *Mystical Theology* and the *Epistles*. It is the doctrine of St. Augustine in his *Confessions* and in his *Soliloquies*; of St. Gregory in his *Morals*, and of St. Bernard in his *Sermons* and in the *Song of Songs*; it is the doctrine of St. Thomas, St. Bonaventura, and of many



other Fathers and Doctors who are highly commended by the Church, both for their knowledge and their sanctity. It is also the doctrine of those authors who are most familiar to us, the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, and of St. François de Sales in his *Treatise on the Love of God*, in which he has explained contemplation at once so lovingly and so devoutly.

So that, Philothea, my doctrine is not mine, but that of those great servants of God, a doctrine which I have drawn from their experiences and their lights, and have interpreted as God has inspired me, conformably to the doctrine of others.

*Philothea.* I am thoroughly convinced by your argument, and it seems to me that once a soul has truly experienced God in contemplation, it will never trouble itself about authorities or proofs, but will content itself by that sufficient instruction which God achieves through experience. There, for my part, I will rest, remembering how often I have heard the words of the Prophet, *O taste and see!* which signifies, as far as I can judge, that in order to know God one must first taste Him.

*Director.* That is very true, Philothea. God alone can make Himself present in the soul that it may taste Him, and provided we have the pure intention of going straight to Him, as detached from all other things as is possible to us, detached from self-love, worldly affairs, and every other passion, we shall never fail to find Him. And he who tastes Him well, loses his taste for every other thing, and if sometimes through weakness or complaisance he returns to the fleshpots of Egypt, the flavour of the celestial manna still remains in his mouth, and forces him to seek it again with more avidity than before. I have known people who, for seven or eight years, had been drawn to contemplation without knowing it. But there are also

others who know all that their Directors and their books can teach them on this matter and who yet do not go forward with assurance. But God is so good that He sometimes makes clear to them, when they do come to Him, all that they would have gained in the preceding years if they had recognized the road along which they were walking, especially when it was not their fault that they did not recognize it.

Ah, Philothea, what wonderful things God would bring to pass in men if they would only allow Him! But some prevent Him, others destroy His work, others make Him wait at the door. And He, not wishing to importune any one unduly, leaves His designs imperfect, His lights without result, His fruits without increase. Our Lord always wishes to make us perfect, as His Heavenly Father is perfect, and to make us one with Him according to the promise He has so often given us in the Gospels. But we, on the other hand, find difficulty in keeping to the path marked out for us by His commandments. We fall away from the nobility of our Father, who invites us to follow Him in the light of reason, and from motives of faith in the interest of our salvation and because of the obligations of our state, by the punishment of some and the reward of others. Yet, in spite of all that, we remain languid and without vigour, falling and rising again, living and dying, willing and not willing; as if God were merely an ordinary master, as if the design He has for our perfection was merely something probable, and not, through His grace, an absolute certainty.

Courage, Philothea! Embrace contemplation as the shortest way to know and to fulfil the designs of God. It is here that the creature makes a sacrifice of all his powers, reasonable, voluntary, and meritorious though they be, to depend on nothing but the Almighty. The



creature makes a sacrifice of human wisdom in order to be filled entirely with Divine Wisdom. He has no longer any will of his own, in order that he may have only one will. He has no longer any memories, in order that he may have only one memory. Never has the soul been nearer true happiness than when it looks continuously towards God. He who follows this path with the eyes of faith, will never walk in darkness; the dim light of contemplation makes him perceive Divine perfection and his own faultiness more clearly than all the light of human wisdom could do. Because such a light, in making us see God above every other thing, makes us see ourselves as infinitely removed from Him who is all, and by the instinctive mistrust it gives us of all creatures, we learn to despise ourselves first of all and to esteem nothing but God. And so we see clearly that contemplation is the one true way to knowledge of God and of self—the two poles of the spiritual life.

This way is not only the most direct, it is also the most certain. So much so, that he who enters on it as he should, seeking nothing but God in the purity of faith, does not claim to have anything, neither great knowledge, nor ardent fervours, nor great consolations. And when it pleases God to send him such favours, he esteems God more than His gifts, and finds more riches in the foundations of his faith than in the most rare and supernatural communications. He believes in God more than he feels Him, more than he tastes Him, and as God is his infinitely admirable and infinitely lovable objective, he regards even the highest and most supernatural joys, whether of wisdom or of love, as small and disproportionate to the Majesty of God. It follows from all this that aridities please the contemplative better than caresses, a courageous belief better than a sweet and consoling one. For caresses



may deceive him when they come from the wiles of the Evil One, or from the over-tenderness of human nature; one may even abuse the caresses which come from God. But faith never deceives us, and the more we impress on ourselves the truth of an ever-present God who sees everything, knows everything, can do everything, through whom everything in heaven and earth acts and exists, the more power we shall have against all accidents, the more zeal, the more wisdom, and a greater participation in all the perfections of God, for such participation will be neither tender nor affective, and it will penetrate the soul without moving it.

For if the contemplative, in the midst of his aridities, has once become aware of the temper of the spirit of God, and if he is truly filled with a sense of its magnitude; then the greatest favours will not inflate, nor dispel, nor diminish its perfection in any way. On the contrary, he will be able to strengthen himself by them in necessity, and he will know how to renounce them, and yet how not to abandon them when he does not require them, counting always on that favour of favours, the possession of God, present by a living faith.

The way of contemplation is, moreover, the most perfect way, more especially as the continual presence of God, which the contemplative holds fast even during the affairs of the day, brings with it all blessings and averts all evils. After all, Philothea, can any one look at God continuously and fail to love Him? How often does it not happen to the contemplative to bless Him, to adore Him, to give thanks to Him, to cast himself on His mercy, to hold up before Him the needs of his neighbour?—which he would not do if he were not in His Presence. And how often would he not be guilty of great and small imperfections, if this holy Presence did not prevent him

from committing them, seeing that it prevents distraction of spirit and the arousing of the passions which are the usual causes of our faults and falls. It is certainly no mystery that the first express and absolute advice for attaining to perfection which God gives in Holy Scripture, is that of walking in His presence. *Walk before me*, He said to Abraham, *and be thou perfect* (Genesis xvii, 1).

There is no devotion which mortifies worldly lusts more continuously than this, which detaches the soul more from things of the world, and makes the wiles of the devil more easily recognized, by holding the human will detached and disinterested from all other loves. For whoso pleases to see God actually and not merely by direction of intention, accustoms himself to see nothing save of Him, in Him, and for Him. So that not seeing God is the cause of all the evil and confusion in the world, while to look at Him without ceasing is a certain and familiar means of attaining to perfection and sanctity.

We abstain from sin in Church, because we think God more present there than elsewhere. But a living faith which sees Him everywhere, honours and loves Him everywhere, and thus makes all the world the Church, the Divine not being more present in one place than it is in another. Churches were only instituted in order to give the opportunity of recollecting oneself better in God, and to elevate the senses by the help of the representation of holy things. But pure faith, animated by holy love and fortified by real intention to God, achieves all this much more efficaciously and strongly than the finest buildings in the world, or the most august religious ceremonial.

An ancient philosopher advised his friend that if he wanted quickly to become a perfect sage, he would set before him some great man as an example, someone

eminent in wisdom and in virtue, and that he should then deliver all his discourses and carry out all his activities as if that sage were listening to him and looking at him incessantly. And there was once a King of Poland who always carried a portrait of his father about with him, in order, he said, that in seeing it he should be reminded that he was his son and so might do nothing unworthy of him. Now, Philothea, if such dead and imaginary presences had the power to hold these men in virtue, what will the living and vivifying presence of God, who wishes us infinite good, not do for us, seeing that He seems forced to take more care and interest in us the nearer we draw to Him?

In a word, Philothea, it is morally impossible for him who dwells in the presence of God to lose himself; it is even impossible that he should not advance greatly through this constant fidelity in which the grace of God never fails. And the most sanctified and greatest solitaries of the Church, with all their mortifications, would have been in many dangers, imperfections, and weaknesses without this blessed presence; it being impossible that one can entertain the sight of God and sin at the same time, or that one should not always love Him whom one is always regarding.

That is why you must always remember, Philothea, that the chief path to contemplation is this continual presence; and when you recollect yourself one hour or two hours in prayer, that is in order to strengthen the presence of God in you, and not in order to leave it at once afterwards.

*Philothea.* I pray God that He may establish me firmly in this path, and that He will help me to renounce all my own desires, that I may have none other save that of abiding in Him, walking and conversing with Him. I am



utterly unworthy of so great a good, but my consolation is that God wills it, and that willing it, He will not fail to help me.

*Director.* And now, Philothea, that is all you need to know in the meantime. You have only to practise it well, and God, who is here more particularly and more interiorly your director than He ever has been, will teach you even greater things in your silence. But as regards the perfection of Christian virtue, He wills always that we should submit ourselves to a director who will help us to recognize the way we should walk in. I will still tell you, from time to time, that which it is necessary for you to know, and will regulate my advice according to your progress.

*Approbation of the Doctors*

WE, the undersigned Doctors of Theology of the Faculty of Paris, certify that we have examined and read attentively a book entitled *Pratique facile pour élever l'Âme à la Contemplation*, the which we have found conformable to the Holy Doctrine of the Faith of Holy Church.

Given at Paris, this third day of March, 1664.

Frère N. CHASTEAV, Religieux Carme.

F. MICHEL BAUDENET, Docteur Regent  
des Carmes.

## SECOND TREATISE

### PREFACE

THE first Treatise on Contemplation was composed with such clearness, considering the difficulty of the subject, that there was no need of further explanation. Scholars who had already made researches into the deep and obscure sources of the spiritual life, saw with pleasure so clear a spring and one so easy to understand. And spiritual people who had none of this knowledge which one draws from writers, but who had received the lights of Heaven, found the practice they employed daily so happily described in that Treatise, that they needed no further information on the subject of contemplation.

But in spite of all that, there are many learned men who have read nothing on such matters, and many spiritual people who have not yet tasted them. It is, therefore, for this larger public that I now write the second part, but my former readers, on considering this new channel of information may possibly wish to go back to the sources from which I drew it, to satisfy themselves more fully on some points which they may have neglected, whether from preoccupation or from being engaged in other ways.

As for those spiritual persons who have not yet any experience of such things, or rather, who are not sufficiently simple in their minds to be content with so simple a practice, they will find here a more detailed explanation of things which have been touched on before, and they will have nothing more to desire on the subject of

contemplation, for I shall treat it alone without dealing with any other kind of prayer.

Had I followed my own inclination, I should have used less argument and less doctrine than I have done; I would willingly have imitated in that way many holy men who have made the whole force of similar treatises to consist in the unction of the Holy Spirit. But I have been obliged to move with the times and to follow other writers of great merit who also adopted this course with regret. Nevertheless I have sought to maintain a balance which, while sufficiently explaining questionable points, leaves them still pleasant to the soul and which, while according with reason, does not forbid the liberty of love. I do not doubt that those who have no need of this explanation, whether on account of their knowledge or of their experience, will yet take some pleasure in it and will perhaps even be strengthened by it against doubts which often do not come so much from what people think themselves as from what is suggested to them from without. Certain spirits are never more displeased with authors than when they enlighten them on a subject they do not wish to know about, and on which they wish to remain opinionated all their lives, in order to be able to follow their own inclinations and interests with more liberty. I am certain I will not satisfy such spirits, and that they will still find much to say about that which I write. But I do not presume to satisfy them, for they are not satisfied with God or with themselves, and the bond which attaches them so closely to their own opinions and their own particular spirit can never be broken save by a miracle. They have risen up against the authors they, read and they will always rise up against them, and they will restate an infinity of things which have been often explained by the apologetic of the saints whom they have attacked,



whom they do not understand and whom they never wish to understand.

And on this subject, my dear reader, I take this opportunity of saying a word to you about the reception which has been accorded to the First Treatise in this book. It is true that I have had the consolation of knowing, that of the readers of whom I have heard, this work has been most appreciated by the most spiritual and the most detached, both in the world and in the cloister. This is the fourth time it has been printed, and I was told a short time ago that it had been translated into Italian. Seeing that I had never put my name to it, and that few people knew it was I who had written it, I have been able to hear disinterestedly what has been said of it in different places. God alone knows the good this little book has done, and it is to Him alone that it must be attributed. But if this Treatise has had the blessing of Heaven, it has certainly had the persecution of men; it has been persecuted by opinionated spirits who, by an over-ardent zeal and by attachment to their own particular ideas, have been more violent against it than those who professed no piety at all. Things have been done and said about this little book which people would find it difficult to believe. The clearness with which it was expressed has raised up its principal persecutors; some have suspected it because it was too easy, thinking nothing deep which was not obscure. Others who, without mortification and without *attrait*, wished to pass to contemplation, imagining that they could do easily that which they could understand easily, have turned their displeasure against this book and have thought that it deceived them, because they deceived themselves in reading it. There have, on the other hand, been souls who, having been disabused by reading this little book, have wished to free themselves from the

constraint in which they had been held for long against their *attrait* and who, being in doubt beforehand as to the state of their prayer, have been enlightened and convinced. Both these two classes of readers have importuned those who directed them with questions, and have thus raised a storm of indignation against this book as well as against many other books they consulted. For directors who resist the *attrait* to contemplation or who have not yet experienced it, will not believe that some who are under their direction can practise contemplation, because they themselves are unable to do so. Others who have not studied the matter do not know how to deal with its difficulties. The errors of the simple have surprised some directors who have imputed to this book the weaknesses of those they directed; even envy has crept into this discussion, envy against those who were able to make a happier use than themselves of this practice, and this has led to such disputes as take place in such cases.

Then, again, many of my own friends, through an over-officious zeal, have not failed to tell me of charges against my book of which I was ignorant, and I have endured excellent mortifications through the discussions that have been held, and the libels that have been uttered against it. But I have hardly replied to such persecution save by prayers for those who took part in it, and by the example of a disciplined life (receiving much comfort from seeing myself ranged beside many great writers on this subject, writers of whom I am merely the shadow), and finally by this Second Treatise, where, without attacking any one, I reply sincerely to the difficulties to be met with in this matter. I refer those not satisfied by my arguments to the many learned Doctors who have treated more fully of these matters, to the experiences of many holy souls, and to that truly apostolic charity which glories in believing

that which it does not understand, and which, quietly following out its own path, allows others to walk in peace along the path God has marked out for them.

I would, therefore, beg that the habit of drawing erroneous conclusions—so discreditable to those who draw them—may cease; that it may no longer be said that when I treat of contemplation I seek to destroy meditation. For if God does not change the order of which He alone is Master, it commonly happens that contemplation is the reward and repose of meditation. What such critics say is, therefore, as erroneous as if they said that those who wrote on meditation tried to destroy contemplation.<sup>1</sup>

I pray God that He may bless my intentions, and that my shortcomings may not cause those who read my works to lose the fruit of that which I write, entreating you, my dear reader, in imitation of one of the great men of our century who ended all the lessons of his famous Catechism thus, to pray for the author of this teaching.

<sup>1</sup>A short paragraph has been omitted here, in which the author recommends to the reader his *Spiritual Poems*, which treat of interior perfection in "a simple and effective manner." These are greatly inferior to the *Treatise* and add nothing to his reputation.



## DIALOGUE I

*After what manner contemplation and the knowledge of God  
should be learned.*

*Philothea.* Your absence has been so prolonged, Father, that it has given me time to collect many difficulties, whether from my own experience or from the experiences of those who have spoken to me about my method of prayer. I am very anxious to enlighten myself.

*Director.* It is a grace, Philothea, to have doubts and difficulties at the beginning, as to this method of prayer. God seems to make these problems arise in the spirit in order that He may Himself answer them by effectual interior response. And so He instructs the spirit fully in all that even the great Doctors of Mysticism would not know how to teach it, being at once the Bridegroom and the Master of such chosen souls. I have known some who after having faithfully abandoned themselves to the spirit of God, received so many graces and lights that they hardly ever read spiritual books or consulted masters of the spiritual life again save only to confirm them in their way; they did not learn anything new, but merely assured themselves that they were not being led astray when they followed their inspirations.

Knowledge of the method of prayer called contemplation is generally reserved by God in order that He may communicate it Himself to the soul. We shall not find any book on this subject by a truly spiritual man which will not be unique in some points, and contain some teaching which will not be found in other books.

The reason why the Holy Spirit teaches this wisdom to souls, is because God Pure, who is the object of contemplation, cannot be so intimately known nor so nobly expressed by the terms of human knowledge, which are material and limited, and which cannot make man know God except in part and by distinct concepts.

The other reason is that most people, prizing knowledge which puffs up more than charity which edifies, do not give themselves much to that prayer wherein God is accustomed to purify their lights and transform them into graces and feelings. Thus keeping in themselves a knowledge which is deprived of the Spirit of God, they can only communicate it in the manner in which they possess it. That is why God, who prefers to illuminate those who humbly ask for His light, rather than those who, by their presumption, would snatch it from Him, seeks from time to time some solitary heart, some simple soul, in order to communicate to it the vast extent of His love. He works miracles of grace in such souls, and gives them such sublime lights that learned men are astonished. Those who are not puffed up by pride of their learning, like Doctors, frankly confess that they would consider it a privilege to be the disciples of those souls whom God so specially trains Himself, in order to learn from them many things of which they themselves are ignorant.

The first time Our Lord appeared in the midst of the Doctors in the synagogue, He was only a child of twelve years old, and it was in the Temple that He spoke to them after having left His parents. It is a mystery revealed only to those who have already learned much, that nothing will ever teach us the magnitude of the great mysteries so much as childlikeness and simplicity of heart. And such teaching will not take place except in the Temple, that is to say, that it is rather in praying than in studying that

they will learn to understand these mysteries, and that such understanding will only come to them after they have generously renounced all the interests of self-love. Their devotion will otherwise be as sterile as their knowledge; producing nothing more than acts of faith which will not be accompanied either by great love or by great courage to serve God.

The same Lord, speaking through His apostles, addresses to them those words which He accompanies with a solemn declaration in order that they should weigh them more seriously: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye become as little children ye shall in nowise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew xviii, 3). Now this saying must not be taken to mean the submission which all scholars are obliged to make to the faith; wise men believe in our mysteries even if they do not always tremble before their majesty and their weight. Nor must those words be taken to mean the obedience they owe the Church in sincerely submitting their feelings and opinions to it. Every one knows well enough that he must give himself to the Church and conform to its tenets and beliefs; but the childlikeness to which the Saviour of the world wishes to reduce the greatest scholars and doctors consists in stripping themselves of an immoderate love of their own branch of knowledge; so that they are brought to abandon to Him by respectful submission all their lights, and sometimes to say to Him:

"Lord! teach Thou me! For the teacher of whom Thou art not the teacher, who does not draw his light from Thee who art the living Source of Truth, is not worthy of the name he bears. Lord! I know not what to say. All my lights are not worth a single ray of Thy grace, and cannot produce in me one glimmer of Thy love, without Thy mercy." It is into such a disposition of



humility that God would lead all learned men; that He may raise them to penetration of the mysteries, and open to them the treasury of His lights in proportion as they abase themselves before Him and detach themselves from their own knowledge and feelings.

It is to such wise men, Philothea, that I direct you when you have need of counsel. You will not only find a solution of your doubts in their advice, but at the same time they will fill your spirit with their lights and will also touch your heart, because the Spirit of God, to which their spirits are subject, gives such power and unction to their words, that they move those who consult them to the depth of their hearts.

You must never cease to esteem and honour in general and in particular all learned men, for even although there are over many who have much knowledge and little virtue, and who often speak of God while rarely speaking to Him, you owe them respect for the knowledge with which they are invested, for knowledge is one of the keys of the Church, and you owe respect to a talent which can contribute to peace of mind. And if they do nothing for themselves, you must remember that they do much for others. Charity obliges you to pray God that He may complete in their hearts by His love, the work He has begun in their spirits by His lights.

*Philothea.* But, Father, is it possible that there are learned men so insensible and so little touched by the lights they have received from heaven? I, in my ignorance, am deeply grateful to God provided I am not ignorant of those things which concern my salvation and perfection. How can one know God and not love Him? But how can one know Him better and not love Him more? He who is so good, so great, so perfect? It seems to me that if I possessed the knowledge of those scholars, I would love

Him incomparably better than I do, because I would know Him better.

*Director.* It is certainly true, Philothea, that if one strove to gain knowledge only in order to love God more, then scholars would have a great advantage over other men. But just as those who have much knowledge do not seek the fire of the love of God, and as those who have a little of the Divine Fire wish to have more and more lights in order to inflame their love, it follows that the one are filled with doctrine and empty of love, and that the others who have a little of the love of God, instead of trying to purify and inflame it under the guidance of the Spirit of God, stifle it under a mass of knowledge to which their self-love sends them with avidity and without respite. That is why, even although there are many who love God, there are few who attain to pure love, for pure love of God regards God only; God being worthy of all honour and of all love for Himself alone and not only for all the thoughts and lights He gives us which make it possible for us to know Him. God unfolds everything to the soul by which He is loved with purity, and He fills it day by day with so lofty a conception of His greatness that finally it comes to love Him without knowing how, and without being able to give any special motive or reason for loving Him. It follows that many learned men have hardly any love among the lights which surround them, because, being full of self-esteem, they are not capable of receiving esteem of God, for that is incompatible with presumption and a good opinion of self. The creature who thus cherishes self-love, resembles a vase with holes pierced in it, which can thus only retain the coarser part of the precious balm with which God has the goodness to anoint His chosen souls, and of which these souls allow the most precious part to escape while they continue to teach and

preach to others. A smaller number, allowing none of the gifts of God to be lost, make a point of collecting and cherishing them from whatsoever quarter they come.

"I thank Thee, O Father," said the Saviour of the world, "that Thou hast hidden these great mysteries from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes." When He wanted to teach the woman of Samaria and make her capable of understanding the highest mysteries of grace, how to discern the law, the goodness of the Messiah, the particular end for which He had come into this world, and how to worship God in spirit and in truth, see how He proceeded. It was while He was making a journey; He went away from His disciples and sat down on the well like a workman exhausted by his work, who did not care where he sat so long as he could get some rest. It was thus that He awaited the woman of Samaria and asked her to give Him water to drink. What humility on the part of our kindly Teacher, to teach a woman well known to be a sinner, and to implant holiness in her soul! The first thing He did was to dissociate Himself from everything that could make Him appear like a Master, such as the number of disciples who accompanied Him. Then He sat down on the well as if He would cover with His body a place which figuratively represented the abyss of knowledge of the Old Testament, being the well of that Jacob who had seen God. He showed us by that, that scholars who wish to inspire the love of God must, as it were, turn their backs on their own learning and look towards the Sun which gives it to others. He was tired and travel-stained from His journey, which constrained Him to sit down—that, also, is the first fruit of knowledge; after much labour and study comes that rest which the spirit finds in sacrificing to God all its own learning, in confessing before Him its powerlessness to



penetrate into the Christian truths, and in asking Him with humility, like St. Thomas, not only the explanation of that which it does not know, but also the power to use well that which it does know.

But here is the fulfilment of the mystery; the Saviour of our souls asked for a drink of water from a woman of Samaria, He who had such ample means of assuaging His thirst without asking a notorious sinner for water. He wished to teach learned people that when Providence gives them opportunity, they should ask frankly for water from those to whom they themselves could give water. That is to say, that there are humble men and pious women of Samaria who have drawn from the sources of grace before many learned men and women. Such learned men and women could supply the humble with the water of knowledge; while the humble in exchange could give them a very different water which flows more directly from the springs of heaven, and which would take them nearer God than that which they could draw elsewhere.

It is thus that the humble lead the learned to God, and that the learned confirm the humble in God; that the simple light the flame in the hearts of the learned, and that the learned pour the light of God into the spirits of the simple; the first communicating His unction, the second communicating material which will make the unction of the simple more perfect and more efficacious, so that in this admirable commerce, the learned instruct the ignorant and the ignorant sanctify the learned, God not wishing that humble and submissive teaching should be left without help, nor that simplicity full of love and confidence should be without power.

Happy, then, is the learned man who humbles himself in the presence of the true servant of God, for the greater men are in learning the more the homage they render

grace by their abasement becomes glorious to God. They are already blessed in that they recognize that there is an invisible manna which the greatest store of knowledge could not help them to taste, but which God showers down with generous hands on the souls of His favoured ones, because the humility of such souls makes them worthy to receive and taste it.

Unhappy are those who add mistrust to the incredulity generally shown towards favoured souls, and who regard as imagination, or as worthless, everything not accepted by the Schools, or quoted from some author. I call such people unhappy because, in despising those whom God favours, they make themselves unworthy to participate in their graces or to taste the savour of that Divine Wisdom which God Himself of His mercy communicates to such pure souls. This misfortune happens to them because they do not sufficiently remind themselves that from the very beginning God has shown grace to the humble, and has spoken to the hearts He has Himself led into interior solitude in order that He might instruct them in the greatest truths of Christianity and the greatest secrets of the spiritual life, without the intervention of books or learned men. It was thus that the Apostles, who had not yet received the full plenitude of the Spirit of God, and who still judged the things of heaven with eyes of flesh and blood, mocked the Magdalene when she came to tell them that their Master was arisen, thinking that she had dreamt it; the greatest mystery of the life of Christ could not first have been revealed to a woman, they thought, to the prejudice of His deeply loved Apostles who would surely learn the truth from the very lips of Him who had been raised up. Nevertheless, they deceived themselves greatly, and their incredulity had so deeply changed their hearts and spirits, that when Our Lord

appeared to them in His own person, they still took Him for a spirit or an apparition. From which you must observe, Philothea, that in order to found the apostolate in the humility of the faith, and to establish in it a spirit of simplicity which would believe all creatures for the love of God, the Angels, those great spirits, to whom means of making themselves believed were not lacking, sent the Magdalene in their place; and thus allowed a woman to announce a mystery which would have been difficult to accept even from the lips of the most learned and holy men. And further, which is more to be admired, the mystery was announced by a woman impassioned and transported by love for her Master, a woman whose extreme love might well have led to the truth of her statement being doubted if her hearers had been led by reason which examines everything, rather than by charity which believes everything.

If, then, the mysteries of the faith could be communicated by a woman (whom Origen has no hesitation in calling for that reason, the Apostle of the Apostles), why do we not often receive from the lips of simple people and from women, the miracles of grace, and the wonders and miracles God may have communicated to them? The great Tauler learnt the secret of perfection from the answers of a beggar he found at a church door, after which he considered his own knowledge with distrust and compassion, seeing that up till that time he had drawn so little help from it for advancing in the ways of God. But after that time his sermons and discourses inflamed all those who heard them with Divine Love; so that this man, who was already called a light in the world, and was highly esteemed, became from that time an ardent fire, setting on fire all those with whom he came in contact.

St. Teresa too in her time, became in mystical knowledge



the teacher of many learned men whom she consulted about other things, and the Church abides gladly by her doctrine. That is to say, Philothea, that you may have as much knowledge of the things of the spirit as learned men, but that you must have simplicity and submission. You must submit your reason, not only to the articles of faith, but also to the wisdom of God, who confounds the vanity of the strong, and makes the humility of the weak to triumph—those humble souls who seek Him in spirit and in truth, without artifice or self-interest, first in those clear and visible ways of Holy Church, which are the infallible rules by which to judge all others, and afterwards in fidelity to the inspirations God pours into the hearts of the just in proportion to the love with which they receive them, and the diligence with which they execute them.

*Philothea.* But, Father, I am not of the number of those happy souls whom God Himself teaches interiorly. My doubts increase day by day, and I feel it a special consolation to be able to profit from your instruction.

*Director.* My daughter, God teaches souls interiorly in three ways: first, in causing difficulties to spring up in the way in which they are already established, in order that in the meeting of those difficulties, those who deal with them, and those who hear them explained, may learn the secret commands of God. For others would often have no idea of His commands if those who asked them for enlightenment had not communicated them in stating their difficulties. One can say of such souls that they are already instructed by God, although they are afraid of not being so instructed.

The second way in which God teaches the soul interiorly is when, without causing difficulties to arise, He imprints on the soul a clear understanding of its state, that it may

walk in simplicity, receiving insights by instinct, not inquiring into either principles or consequences, but going forward simply in this way. Just as a shepherd, looking at a star, declares with certitude that there will be wind, and that the weather will be good, without requiring to know the different properties of the different stars, nor all the results of the observations of the astrologers. The spiritual man, too, judges his progress by instinct, and directs his action according to the will of God thus recognized.

The third way in which God teaches the soul interiorly is when He directs us by His Providence to confessors, preachers, friends, or books which teach us that which is necessary for our state. They put a word into our souls which is, as it were, a seed sown there by God; suddenly or gradually it unfolds and develops into knowledge, and by its inspiration, which says more than all we have previously learnt, it enlightens us and leads us continuously towards our goal. It is thus that the soul is aware of being enlightened without knowing how, and that that which it has gained from without seems almost nothing compared with that which God has taught it.

But, Philothea, God will teach you in the way which seems best to Him whether through men or of Himself. His holy will must always be your teacher, and even after men have taught you much, God has depths of wisdom which are inexhaustible, depths from which lights and instruction will never cease to come. For in this way He will exercise your humility in causing you to learn from without, and your fidelity in making you listen within.

What more have you to ask me?

## DIALOGUE II

*In which the nature of that contemplation is explained which has already become habitual and which produces a familiarity between God and the soul.*

*Philothea.* Father, what is Contemplation?

*Director.* But Philothea, what is this that you ask me? Do you not remember what I explained to you long ago, and which you then seemed to understand so well?

*Philothea.* I have not forgotten what you taught me, but I take pleasure in retasting that which I have already learnt. For knowledge of God has passed some time since into a taste of God. I can say now that He is more present to me than represented to me, and that it is now more true that I possess something than that I reason about it or consider it. That is why I am eager to know whether I am deceiving myself or whether I may be satisfied with this manner of being with God.

*Director.* To taste God rather than to know Him, to possess Him rather than to consider Him, these are signs that God has begun to confirm us in that state in which He gradually established us by frequent acts. Actual and ordinary contemplation of God is a gentle effort by which the soul, helped by the grace of God, represents Him to itself under a general concept. We are always conscious in some way of this effort, by the application we bring to it, or by the trouble of passing from one disposition of soul to another, or by some interior words which we frame in order to have a form in which to think of God. But when grace has uplifted nature, this effort



ceases, and there remains the serene and peaceful habitude of the act we have so often reiterated.

This habit of regarding God simply and naturally, without effort and without contention, accustoms us, little by little, to being in His company and enables us to taste His sweetness. There are good friends, Philothea, who have dispensed with compliments and ceremonies; we do not waste time in making them useless and studied compliments; they come in unannounced, and let us see them quite naturally just as they are. And it is thus with God, who seeks us with even greater eagerness and thirst than we seek Him, not having come down to the world for any other purpose than to dwell in us. When once souls have received Him by the familiar presence He communicates to them, He is no longer merely their host, as in those who only think of Him at certain times, and who leave Him alone in their souls as in a fearful solitude, without looking at Him or speaking to Him. He is their friend and familiar; He speaks and is listened to; He illumines and is regarded; He feeds and is tasted; He commands and is obeyed; in fine He speaks lovingly with the soul, which on its part keeps Him faithful and continuous company. For to be real, all love must be reciprocal. God thinks continuously of each one of us as if he had no one but ourselves; it is therefore no more than just if we think continuously of Him, as if we had no one but Himself. Oh, the blindness of men, Philothea, who not having yet understood that they were only created for God, dare to think it strange that we should always think of God, and that we have no more familiar object than God! There is a time to speak and a time to be silent, says the Sage; a time to laugh and a time to weep; a time to sow and a time to reap. There are fixed times for all things, and it would manifestly be out of order to do at

one moment what we ought to do at another. But there is no time in which we ought not to love God and think of Him. We ought to think of Him by day and by night, when we are busy and when we are at rest, in company and in solitude, at all times and in every place. The holy companionship of God never wearies us, never embarrasses us; it is not troublesome, nor bitter, nor inconvenient, and when we take it with us in our familiar thoughts, it has the blessed property of mingling with whatever we are doing; it never separates itself from our affairs, not even from our most trifling conversations.

But in what way, they say, are we always to think of God so that this continual application shall not greatly interfere with our worldly life? Think of Him often, Philothea, and such thoughts will not disturb or deflect you; they will rather accompany you, go before you, follow you, and generally awaken you. If someone ordered you to make twenty-five or thirty respirations every minute, you would repulse such a suggestion; you would think it would impede all your actions. Yet you breathe every moment without noticing it, and you do not cease to act with as much liberty as if nothing were going on in you. Man is never without some passion, some present objective which has nothing to do with the great objective he has in view, and which is of no use the greater part of the time save to appease or exercise the perpetual activity of the human mind. And seeing that the mind cannot help being occupied by some vain and useless thought, in the midst of our most important occupations, it is far better to occupy it with God who never enters into us without doing us good, and who never dwells in us without doing us more good.

*Philothea.* Truly, Father, I can say that every good has come to me through that sense of the familiar presence of

God, and that I do outside things with so marvellous a facility that it is rather His *attrait* which carries me through what I am doing, than any application of my own. The state in which I now am seems to me to be a perpetual and actual invocation of the Divine Spirit, without, nevertheless, my making any express acts to invoke it. How then can I fail to recognize His help in everything I do, and what could disturb me, seeing that I carry joy and peace in my soul?

*Director.* If the words of the Apostle are true, that where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom—how can they fail to be even more true when we cherish the Spirit of God in thinking continuously of Him? And if the Apostle exhorts us to rejoice when God is near us, what would he not exhort us to do when God has become familiar to us? The wings of the dove do not weigh it down, they carry and support it. And so the thought of God is never a burden; it is like a gentle breeze which bears us up, a hand which supports us and raises us, a light which guides us, and a spirit which vivifies us even although we do not feel its working.

That is what made you say, Philothea, that your *attrait* is no longer a knowledge of God, but something by which you are seized and penetrated, something you taste and which never separates itself from you. I will, therefore, use your own words in replying to you. Contemplation is an experimental taste of God Present. It is a taste, because the soul does with delight that which before it did with difficulty and labour. It is a taste, because the soul feels itself stronger and better supported than it was before by a simple light. It is a taste, because it tempers and seasons with its sweetness everything we do; it is an experimental taste, not of opinion, nor of reason; for other opinions and reasons might lead us to change; but a clear



and sensible experience which we cannot explain but also which we cannot deny. It is a taste of God, and not merely of His perfections or His mysteries or His favours, but of God Himself in whom we find loving enjoyment and sovereign rest. It suffices us that it is God, without entering into details or making reflections about the way in which God lets Himself be seen and tasted, which would only interfere with His working. A taste of God Present, as much as the presence of God which has brought it to us, perseveres in us with this intimate gentleness, and the one is fortified by the other; for the taste quickens the presence of God, and the presence of God augments the taste. The Prophet expressed that well when he said, *Taste and see that the Lord is good*. We taste, and that is the first essay in real contemplation. We see, and that is an effect of contemplation, which is to illumine. We find how good the Lord is, and that is a reflux of that light on the soul which makes us more eager, more loving, and if one can so express it, more astounded by God. There is a herb which has the virtue of clearing the vision of him who eats it, and when his sight is clarified he sees more clearly the very herb of which he has eaten. God allows us to taste Him in order that we may see Him, and when we have seen Him through the light of faith and contemplation, we taste Him yet more perfectly.

It is thus, Philothea, that you have risen up by degrees. The act of faith by which you regarded God as present caused you to cease to reason, that habit once formed caused the distinct act to cease; the habit of seeing God brought you an experience of God which is no longer your simple act or habit alone, but something even more perfect, even although the habit has not ceased.

*Philothea.* I understand what you explain to me, Father, not as a soul which has reason and instruction

forced upon it, but as a soul of which you touch the springs and stir the depths. You rather arouse the remembrance of what takes place in me than give me fresh light. But your reasoning is, nevertheless, very necessary to convince me, because I should not have dared to believe all that of myself, and should have been afraid to give myself any credit in matters so spiritual and so delicate. You are like those wise physicians who touch certain parts of the body to which the invalid himself would not have thought of attributing his suffering. For as the physician touches and reasons at the same time, the invalid may reply, "Yes! It was there that I felt the pain," a reply which he would not have known how to make before, in spite of all the reasonings and questionings that might have been made to him.

How admirable God is, Father, to precede even in souls the teaching of men! Learned men show us His spirit; they do not communicate it: they let us know what is in the soul in disclosing its operation, not in producing it. But in order the better to discern what I feel through the clearness of your explanation, and in order that I may be able to communicate it to others, tell me of your goodness: Can knowledge of God be found in contemplation without love, or love without knowledge?

*Director.* It is rare that either in actual or habitual contemplation, knowledge of God is not united with love, because contemplation is a taste and an enjoyment of God, and the enjoyment of a good, however imperfect it may be, is always accompanied by love. God's aim in such a state, is to elevate the soul to faith, and He never elevates the soul without inflaming it with love at the same moment, because it is not knowledge which unites us to God, but love. Moreover, that which one knows in contemplation, is an obscure and incomprehensible knowledge of God.

For God is above every conception and every thought of human knowledge, and cannot be expressed by words; as we have insinuated several times, and as all the mystics tell us. This incomprehensibility produces admiration, admiration produces delight, delight produces love. The soul also knows that it is in rest and peace when it is recollected by this *attrait*. If it is in this rest, it follows of necessity that it loves, and that it can say with the Bride of the Canticles, *Sub umbra illius quem desideraveram, sedi et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo* (Song of Songs ii, 3). ("I sat down under his shadow with delight; and his fruit was sweet to my taste.")

This shadow is nothing but the obscurity of faith, by favour of which the soul is raised up to God. It calls Him whom it has desired, not knowing what name to give Him because He is incomprehensible to it. It is seated in order that it may taste the sweetness of His fruit; because its knowledge is not idle, and being a fruit of God, it is there to be tasted, and not simply to be seen as the fruits of human knowledge are. So that, Philothea, there is no contemplation without love, it being produced for love and nearly always by love itself.

*Philothea*. What you say is very true. And yet one does not always feel this love, although one is always conscious of it in the presence of God, and this consciousness is clearer and more natural than ordinary consciousness.

*Director*. The love which we feel towards creaturely things, Philothea, is a movement, or rather an inquietude of soul which seeks to satisfy itself. For as creaturely things are not our true end, love of them is never our true rest. Love of God, on the contrary, is not so much a movement towards as a union with our objective, a rest in God as far as that is possible in this world. It follows from this, that love of creatures will still make itself felt,



and, by an imitation of nature, love of God will also make itself felt when we seek it with effort and inspiration. But when God communicates Himself to the soul with this ray of faith which lifts it above the senses, love is as little felt as knowledge, following in that the condition of the object known, which being very pure and very spiritual, only leaves the spirit of love and not the consciousness of it. There are certain substances, Philothea, which burn without showing flame, and there are souls which love without being consciously inflamed. Thus you will perceive in yourself the presence of God more easily than the love of God, even although the presence is never without love.

If all love of God were sensibly felt, then it would follow that the Saints had never possessed it, for they were often so overwhelmed by suffering that they cried out with the Saviour of the world, "My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" It would follow that purely spiritual contrition was not real love, because it was not consciously felt. Love which can be felt, can be measured by the feeling which perceives it; but love of God must be something infinite, seeing that the knowledge we have of Him stretches to infinity, and so do the grace and faith which are its natural sources, the one being a participation of Divine Truth, the other of Divine Charity. And further, Philothea, you have often heard it said that true love of God is an admiring love rather than a fervent love. I assure you that this admiring love is better practised in contemplation than in any other state, because admiration is founded on the knowledge one has of that which one admires. How then shall we not admire, how shall we not love Him whom we would not compare to anything in the world, and whom we regard as above every created thing?

There is yet another thing which leads to our not perceiv-

ing love so clearly in contemplation as in knowledge; and that is that the intelligible object seizes the understanding with more force and possessiveness than the loveable object seizes the will. This is so because in the understanding the process takes place according to its nature, and in the will according to certain conditions. And also, the understanding becomes, in a sense, that which it beholds, as the maxim of the philosophers puts it, while the will requires to be moved and excited by the understanding in order to grasp its object, and has not the virtue of changing itself, like the understanding, into the nature of its object. From which you see that that which the understanding comprehends, carries with it a greater consciousness of presence than that which the will receives; the understanding being the first motive-power of love as well as furnishing the material to inflame it.

But, Philothea, to contemplate is always to love. For I ask you, is it not love, to will firmly never to forsake the object of one's love? Is it not love to prefer to all thought of other things the one thought of God, and to keep this One Essential in the midst of all the turmoil and agitation the world can cause us? Is it not love to have one's eyes always fixed on one's Beloved in order to obey more easily His movements and His inspirations, the slightest sign He may make to us, without ever turning our eyes to material things except when necessity or charity bids us to do so? Contemplation without love is the contemplation of a philosopher; and is, in truth, that which we call obscure and unknown in this prayer, not communicating any taste to the senses, nor any distinct light to the understanding. Man would not be able to endure such prayer for long, with its darkness and dryness, were he not sustained and eased by a secret influx of Divine Love.

*Philothea.* I would not lose this which I do not feel for all I might ever feel, and when it does happen to me that the love of God is sensibly felt, the very feeling I receive in it is as an opening through which I recognize the depth and capacity of that love which never reaches to the senses. Just as on a dull day he who feels a drop of rain on his face looks up into the sky and sees dark clouds which would fall in torrents and not in tiny drops, were they not held back by some disposition of the air. How good it is to love God with the love of faith, which does not consist simply in believing that one loves Him, for many people might thus deceive themselves as to their belief; but which is rather a certain impulse of the will which tends towards God with all its strength and which, finding itself weighed down with the weight of the inestimable good it embraces, remains powerless and speechless, knowing rather that it longs to love than that it truly does love. The will, in such a state, resembles those invalids who are not aware of their habitual languor, but who recognize only too well, when they wish to make an effort, that their strength is nothing but weakness, and that the difficulty they have in moving is a sign that they have no longer any power of movement.

*Director.* You explain yourself well, *Philothea*. To love in contemplation, is to languish, while to know is not to see. We do not feel in ourselves the movements of the heart in the functions of our natural life, and we are not conscious of the movements of the will in the operations of the life of the spirit. For God, because He is above every intelligent being, is not applied to the contemplative soul under the comparison of any created thing; because He is neither substance, quantity, nor quality, He is neither life nor goodness nor intelligence, understood after our human fashion, as *Dionysius* explains



in the fourth and fifth chapters of the *Mystical Theology*. In the same way He is above all love, so that He cannot be loved with that love with which we love beauty, goodness, pleasure, glory, magnificence; nor with the love with which we love justice, piety, and all the other virtues; nor with the love with which we love plants, animals, men, or angels; nor, finally, with that love with which we love ourselves and our own happiness; but with a love above all love, and with a delight above all delight. To know God in this way is a negation of all distinct knowledge, to love Him thus is a negation of all distinct love. O Love! O Knowledge ineffable! how much better to be ignorant of Thee than to comprehend Thee! In olden times, Philothea, the people of God were led in the desert by a pillar which was of cloud by day, and in the darkness of night, a light. The same thing happens to the soul who walks in the interior desert; the Sun of Reason is not so luminous for it as the Divine Darkness which covers it; while, on the contrary, during the night and the voluntary eclipses of reason, this Divine Darkness becomes light, and one sees it more clearly when one can no longer see anything else.

*Philothea*. But, Father, is there always knowledge in contemplation? Is Love never met with alone?

*Director*. It is sometimes possible to find knowledge without love, but it is never possible to find love without knowledge. The reason is that the understanding does not require the action of the will in order to know its object; but the will always has need of the light of understanding in order to love its object. Every lovable object is a known good; it is therefore known before it is embraced as a good, and even when the will attaches itself to a false good, under the appearance and shadow of a veritable good, it is necessary that the understanding should

represent to it these appearances and these shadows of good, and that it should deceive the will in order to make its object appear agreeable, seeing that it is not the province of the will to discern, but to love.

And so, Philothea, there is no love of God without knowledge of God. Faith teaches us that He is Almighty, All-wise, All-good. Hope gives us courage to aspire to possess Him; which we could not otherwise dare to hope, considering our weakness and the infinite disproportion between us and this Sovereign Being. Charity, borne on its two wings, flies straight to the heart of God and unites itself closely to Him, being informed and assured that He wishes to allow Himself to be loved by His creature. But the love which follows contemplation is an influence of Divine Charity, and in consequence it presupposes faith as well as the ray of contemplation which inflames the will.

And further, Philothea, charity gives the impulse to all the Christian virtues, but every virtue in particular furnishes charity with its material. If we humble ourselves through love, we must first recognize our own nothingness; if we wish to show mercy towards our neighbour, we must first have known the misery which touched our hearts, and so each virtue proposes a different motive to the charity which arouses it, and bears it forward towards the object known. Love in contemplation is of the same nature, being a love of God, and it works in the same way. From the time that the presence of God is continual in a soul, it is needless to ask whether love supposes knowledge, and even when the presence comes in flashes and from time to time, it is always some movement of faith which produces it, and thus the love which one feels is the natural result of this faith.

*Philothea.* But, Father, how many souls one sees who

are inflamed in a moment with love, and carried right out of themselves, without this having been preceded, either by imagination or by knowledge of anything! And the love which thus began without knowledge seems also to endure without knowledge. The soul does not know at such a time either how or why it loves; it does not know what it does or what it says; but it burns, it languishes, it dies.

*Director.* Such a soul, Philothea, resembles a wounded man who has received so sudden and violent a blow, that he sees the blood flowing from the wound before he sees the sword and the enemy who drew it. A little knowledge sometimes lights a great love, and this love becomes all at once so impetuous and so vehement that one no longer remembers the knowledge which aroused it. It happens also at other times that human understanding is dazzled by the Divine brightness; this dazzling light throws it in a moment into a terrible darkness which proceeds from the overwhelming brilliance of the light which blinds it, the power of which it is unable to bear. Nevertheless, the fire is lighted, the soul is inflamed by the familiar approaches of its God, and it loves Him without comprehending His nature or the character of the communication with which He awakens it; being more enraptured by its ignorance than by any distinct knowledge it possesses, glorying more in its darkness than in all the clear lights of the senses and of reason. "I rejoice," said one soul, "that God should be incomprehensible; I would not comprehend either His works or His mysteries, were such comprehension possible to me; and if such should be His pleasure, I would love Him for a whole eternity without seeing Him. Ah! how enraptured I am," it went on, "that neither men nor angels, nor even the most holy humanity of Jesus Christ, can



understand all that He is, that He is only comprehensible to Himself alone. He is so great that a single spark of His knowledge would set a thousand worlds on fire with His love. But what is it to know only that God is? Is it not to know much more than we can say or think; and must we not forget everything to enjoy this ineffable truth?"

It must be said, Philothea, that in nature, the sweet enjoyment of love sometimes overwhelms the soul, and makes it forget what it formerly knew of the merit and excellence of its object, because it is utterly absorbed in that which it loves. But in the long run, the economy of grace is not in this matter contrary to the order of nature. The will always depends on the understanding, and one would not know how to love without first having known. Let me add here what I have already explained with sufficient clearness, that the act of contemplation is not a distinct act, seeing that the love which accompanies it, distinguishing very little itself, seems to know nothing of the whole operation, while in fact it does know something which satisfies and sustains it.

You can also gather from this teaching that the love may often be greater than the knowledge which produces it, it being much easier to love than to know. The reason is that the understanding pursues its object in a very different way from the will; for in order to know clearly, one must examine and discuss; one must know the essence, the properties, and the parts of the subject one reasons about; one must penetrate into the principles of things and see things as they are in themselves, and not merely as they are in our opinion. But to love much, one needs nothing but to look at the object loved, however simple it may be; and the will, enclosing it firmly in itself at the same time, loves it as much as it wishes or as much as

it can. It follows from this that many love a science of which they have sometimes very slight knowledge, merely for its usefulness or for the glory it brings to those who possess it. There are people who become passionately enamoured of some beauty, when one shows them a slight representation of it. And people will sometimes let themselves be carried away by love for a great or wise man or someone of extreme merit, without really knowing their eminent qualities, and only because of a rumour they have heard, or some service they have received.

It is very much the same, Philothea, with the love of God. The understanding cannot at all comprehend God, for, as the Apostle says, we only see Him in a glass darkly. But the will embraces Him, all hidden and incomprehensible as He is, and in the words of St. Bonaventura, "Love mounts higher than knowledge and approaches God at a height which the understanding cannot attain in this life." It follows from this that many simple people love Him more perfectly than the most enlightened and sublime spirits, that the whole Law of God is reduced to the commandment of love, and that it is by the greatness of love that sanctity is to be measured.

It is incredible, Philothea, how far love will go when once inflamed by a simple ray of faith. It is love which causes unions and transformations in God, and not knowledge; God being proposed to man in this life as an object of love, in creating him in His own image and likeness; the whole life of His Son, moreover, being nothing but one continual love, as well as His dying for the love He bore us. Love makes all the saints on the earth, as knowledge makes all the blessed in heaven.

Courage, Philothea! it is not necessary to know much in order to love, but in loving you will always come to know God more perfectly, and with a knowledge which

St. Bonaventura calls affective and experimental, in which love and light are so intermingled that one might almost say the understanding wished to love God, while the will wished to know Him. And thus the two acts of these faculties seem to be but one: all love is light and all light is love. The lambs know their mothers by instinct and by sympathy, they sometimes run towards them without seeing them. The soul that is truly touched by the dart of love does not simply know God; it is conscious of Him in a shadow, in a vestige, in the slightest movement He makes in a creature, or of Himself in the heart, however imperceptible such movement may be. Sometimes the soul even feels God when He is silent and when He hides Himself. Many joyful thoughts of God, and many lively affections, spring from that consciousness; one cannot express them, for reason supplies no suitable terms nor words which adequately convey them. And when the Saints are obliged to declare these great things in ordinary words, their sayings have always two meanings, the one clear, the other profound; the one which is understood of all, the other which, though expressed by the same words, is only comprehensible to those who have experienced the thing spoken of. Just as in Holy Scripture we see how the same passage adequately instructs the simple, and deeply exercises the minds of scholars: Holy Scripture being, in the words of St. Gregory, "a deep and full river in which lambs may wade and elephants swim."

Many, instead of considering this truth in reading the affective lives and meditations of the saints, often imagine that they merely repeat the same things. Such people allow themselves to be deceived by the similarity of terms, and the indispensable necessity the saints had to follow, of speaking as those who speak even although their thoughts soar far above their expressions and their words,



not only as regards the feelings of experimental love, but also as regards the profound knowledge God communicates to them of our mysteries. For we would be very unreasonable if we thought that a St. Thomas or a St. Bonaventura, who were veritable Seraphim of Love, knew nothing of God save that which could be taught by ordinary theology, and that the wisdom of the Holy Spirit was not of infinitely greater extent than that of our schools. We must deeply reverence the books of the saints and friends of God, Philothea; and if we read them with humility we shall never be wearied by that which others call repetitions and ordinary thoughts, but we shall find hidden treasure both in their lights and in their savours.

*Philothea.* O God, who will give me a little of this love, not in order to acquire more knowledge, but in order the better to please Our Lord, who must be more greatly loved than all the graces He gives us and all the knowledge He communicates to us? Happy are the souls who set their perfection in love, and who would be ready to renounce their perfection, could such perfection separate them from love.

### DIALOGUE III

*In which faculty of the soul contemplation takes place ; which act it is of this faculty ; what suspension one exercises in it, and whether the soul is purely passive in this state.*

*Philothea.* One must admit, Father, that the habit of contemplation establishes itself so gently in a soul that it gradually takes possession of all the faculties, till there is not one which does not participate in some degree in its *attrait*. The understanding finds itself plunged in a confused knowledge of the Divine which, though containing neither image nor words, yet represents God more vividly than the clearest images of the senses. The understanding is thus penetrated more profoundly than by the most lofty reasoning, gazing ceaselessly at God as incomprehensible and ineffable. The will, too, has its share in so great a good, loving God in the same way that the understanding knows Him; rejoicing that God is what He is, and possessing Him under this general concept as the most perfect Good, the most lovable Being in the whole world. The memory reminds itself of Him with a memory that is confused in proportion to its knowledge. And if the inward senses, which cannot attach themselves, save to phantoms and images, are not allowed to share in this happy communication of the Divine, one would at least say that they made an effort to participate; and that they gave evidence by their distraction and by the impatience they showed at being kept thus within their bounds, that they are not content to be in the abandonment in which they are left, while the rest of the soul seems to be in enjoyment.

But tell me, Father, which is precisely the faculty of the soul in which contemplation resides, and from which it radiates out on the other faculties which receive it?

*Director.* It would seem that you are well instructed in the economy of the soul which I spoke of in the First Treatise, and that you confine contemplation to the higher part of the soul, and hold the lower part incapable of participating in it. For if devout people had even a slight knowledge of the faculties of the soul, distinguishing their acts and their different methods of procedure, they would save themselves the infinity of trouble such ignorance causes them, or rather which the little reflection they make gives them. It is a fact which experience proves to us every day, that the activity of the faculties of our souls produces a mass of strange imaginations and reasonings, according to the natural disposition and profession of each one of us. This mass oppresses us and fills our life with distraction and inquietude; whereas we would absolutely distrust it were we once thoroughly convinced that it all proceeds rather from a soul which is too eager and too active, than from the designs of God, or the finesse of the devil, or even from our own will when it is controlled and does not allow itself to follow the perpetual flux and reflux of images and things. Remember carefully, Philothea, what I will teach you in this dialogue, and use carefully the remedy I recommend to you here, to arrest this feverish activity. The greater part of the wisdom of the ancients who wished to live tranquilly, and a good part of Christian wisdom, which wishes to empty itself of everything in order to fill itself with God, consists in these two points: to know one's soul, and to moderate its activity.

I would therefore answer you thus, Philothea, presupposing the doctrine I have already set forth; that



contemplation takes place in the understanding; that to contemplate is to know, and that the understanding is the only faculty of the soul which knows. It follows that those writers who have defined contemplation have defined it in terms concerned with the understanding, calling it at one time "lofty knowledge," at another "tasting wisdom," "experimental knowledge," "secret intercourse with God," "loving regard of the Divine Dark," "learned ignorance of God," and describing it in a hundred other ways which express either its nature, or its properties, or its effects, or its praises with regard to the elevation of the understanding.

But contemplation, if it is acquired, is nothing but a very perfect exercise of faith accompanied by the grace of God; if it is supernatural it is infused light, and all light is within the province of the understanding, just as all love, human and Divine, exercises itself through the will.

*Philothea.* Why does one sometimes speak of the summit of the understanding? Are there in the human understanding two different powers, and if so, in which of the two does contemplation take place?

*Director.* There is neither height nor depth nor summit nor surface in the soul of man because, being spiritual, it has neither parts nor divisions. So that what I now tell you is very true, that the whole of your soul is just as much at the point of one of your fingers as in the whole of your body: in the same way that the reflection of a mountain can be contained in a small eye just as well as in a big one, and that it can be found whole and entire in two hundred eyes as well as in one solitary eye. The soul is therefore neither broad nor long nor deep; it has neither degrees nor strata; it is neither coarse nor fine, heavy nor light; it has none of the conditions which pertain to material things. But in so far as we judge spiritual things

by some comparison with material things which we know better and which lie daily before our eyes, we call the summit of the understanding the highest manner of conceiving, and we call the surface of the understanding the easiest and most familiar way of understanding things.

The understanding of the soul is single, but it has a double virtue, just as one flower has various properties. Its first virtue is a power of reasoning, a power of drawing a conclusion from its principles, and is called ratiocination. The other is a power of understanding without reasoning, which is exercised by the sole and simple regard of the object which presents itself; this power is called intelligence. For example, if I wish to prove that one must love justice, I prove my proposition by the nature and excellencies of justice, and I conclude from them that we must love it; that is called reasoning, and the act which produces it ratiocination. But if, by the habit I have contracted of seeing the beauty of justice in itself, I feel myself convinced of this proposition that we must love justice, then I do not detain myself by proving that which I know, and in representing to myself only that we must love justice, I understand at once that which I say without being under the necessity of examining it in detail. One calls this simple knowledge, and the act which produces it, intelligence. But, it is for all that, one and the same understanding, simple and indivisible, which contains ratiocination and intelligence. But I say, Philothea, that contemplation, not being an express reasoning about the Divine, is not, properly speaking, found in ratiocination, but that, being a simple sight of God Present, of which the soul is convinced and, as it were, possessed by force of habit accompanied by grace, it resides in consequence in the intelligence, whose property it is to consider things with a simple regard and not to reason or discuss them.



Intelligence understood in this way is called by the mystics the summit or higher part of the understanding; or, in other words which really mean the same thing, it is a simple and general concept. He who reasons considers the parts of his object one after the other; he examines them, defines them, divides them, exhibits them. But he who regards things with a simple sight considers his whole object at once, without seeking either principle or consequence, and so he enjoys it without trouble by a general concept of all the particular truths to be found within its compass.

A Christian who has so often heard God spoken of, forms for himself, little by little, from the diverse concepts which have been offered him, the most perfect idea of God possible to his capacity; so much so that when he comes to consider that God is great, that He is almighty, or that He is good, he does not have recourse to each of those truths, or to all the thoughts he has conceived about them at various times, but relying on that which he knows, he embraces each truth as infallible without proving or contesting it. The ray of faith makes him adhere the more invariably to this proposition, and if the help of contemplation is added to special meditation and to faith, these three operations united, in which faith perfects reason and contemplation fortifies faith, make it so certain and so sensible a truth of religion that together they create a happy necessity of belief. While on the other hand, those many Christians who do not exercise themselves in the practice of faith find it a trouble and a captivity to believe what it teaches.

You see, therefore, Philothea, that contemplation is not an act of reason as meditation is; it is rather an act of intelligence acquired by the light of faith which teaches us that God is in us, and we are in God. Contemplation



is established by the continual exercise of the presence of God; it is purified and perfected by the help of grace which calls us, attracts us, establishes us, and preserves us in this wholly luminous and loving way of the Divine, in which the soul declares continuously, while saying nothing, that *God is*, and in this truth it tastes other particular truths without either meditating or reasoning.

I say the same of the affection which follows this knowledge, for as the various considerations of God collect together and unite and meet in one sole idea which comprises them all, so, too, the distinct affections we have formed for God produce a universal affection in which we taste with much sweetness all the other affections. St. François de Sales in the fifth chapter of his *Treatise of the Love of God* calls it a "quintessence of affections," and a "contemplative affection." It is thus that one sees in one comprehensive glance all the beauties of a meadow, that one smells at the same moment all the different flowers of a bouquet, that one hears simultaneously all the different instruments of an orchestra, without such mingling of sight or scent or sound in any way confusing the senses affected. On the contrary, they are marvellously refreshed by the variety of united things, and by the union of many different things. But as the spirit is more universal and more lofty than the senses, it has more power to unite and simplify things, whether through knowledge or through love, and the more the ideas that are comprehended by it, the more they are proportioned to its excellence and its nobility.

*Philothea.* But how is this act which one calls intelligence more simple and more perfect than reasoning?

*Director.* It is simpler because in its unity it comprises the multiplicity of other thoughts, just in the same way as a piece of gold which is small and light contains the value

of many silver and copper coins of less value. So that this act by which I say *God is*, and which has passed into a fixed regard of the Divine, comprises in itself all that I know of God, even although I do not stir up all my particular and distinct knowledge of Him; and it is certain that the faith and grace of contemplation make it more pure and more universal. From which comes this height and plenitude in which the soul sometimes finds itself, and during which it cannot express its joy. It would certainly do so if its knowledge were anything but a confused memory; as when one looks at several things at once which one can afterwards enumerate in general but not in particular. The soul is filled by something which unites it and awakes it in itself. That is why when one calls this act a confused act, the term *confused* does not signify anything which troubles or embarrasses the spirit; it signifies only that it is not a distinct act of some Divine perfection, but an act which contains in itself the idea of God in an obscure, general and unifying manner.

This act is also more perfect than reasoning because in reasoning the soul speaks, while in this act it enjoys. Reasoning, even in matters of faith, convinces the soul by its principles, but here the soul is rather illumined than convinced, it sees rather than examines. Reasoning occupies itself in the consideration of a word, a proposition, or a discourse; but this simple sight of God, supposing all reasonings as things passed and known, contemplates its object in God Himself. Every reasoning is subject to a contrary reasoning, and every truth to an error directly opposed to it. But here the soul does not reason at all, because it knows nothing in opposition to its object, any more than he who sees light can imagine any quality contrary to light, excepting that darkness which is not a contrary quality, but purely and simply a privation.

If sometimes the soul seems to doubt the possession of its object, even while perfectly established in it, its doubt does not come from its object, but from the profound and respectful fear into which its object has thrown it. It comes also from the dazzling bewilderment in which it often finds itself through an excess of light: also from the scruples aroused in it as to its own state by those who do not share its experiences. It comes from the extreme humility which this state in itself produces, the soul not deeming itself worthy of so signal a favour. But it never comes from any contrary reason which it sees in what it has conceived; the more that its object is God, who is singularly communicated to the soul by the exercise of faith and the grace of contemplation, under a general concept. The contemplative soul does, indeed, doubt very gravely when one forces it to reason, but it never doubts when one allows it to delight in God.

One might say that there is the same difference between this general concept and reasoning as there is between light and colour. One distinguishes colours according to their kinds, but light remains in its nature always the same, though it can be greater or less according as it is more or less diffuse and as the subject in which it is found has more or less capacity for reflecting it. The presence of God produces light in the soul, or to speak more correctly it is this light itself which keeps alive in us a perpetual belief that God is, without particularizing as to what He is.

*Philothea.* I am well satisfied with your reasons, for, after all, do we not concede that the eye is not affected by any colour and yet that it discerns all colours; that the ear has no sound proper to itself, and that nevertheless it distinguishes all different sounds; that the brain has no particular feeling and yet does not fail to be the instrument of all feeling? In the same way, while



this Divine Light does not represent anything express or distinct as to the perfections of God, it yet expresses and distinguishes, when need arises, all the special things which together constitute the universal object of the Divine. But, Father, what can I say to those who protest that the void in which the soul sets itself in order to receive this light more perfectly, is a dangerous suspension, and that St. Teresa among others, whose teaching is wholly celestial, has condemned it in her works?

*Director.* St. Teresa is not understood by all those who concern themselves with her works, and especially not by those pious women who boast of having her books constantly in their hands. And because I have a profound veneration for this Saint, and because I owe her many favours, I will explain to you in passing what things must be observed by those who read her divine works, if they wish to read them with profit and not to confound her doctrine with the opinions they themselves have espoused.

There are three things to consider in St. Teresa; her style, her matter, her zeal. As regards her style, she wrote naïvely and in everyday language, without any rigorous method, although she does not lack some method. The matters of which she treats are for the most part high and exalted, and her doctrine is that of heaven rather than of earth. Her zeal is directed towards inflaming souls illumined by God, holding them on their way rather than teaching them. As she uses everyday language, and as she takes for granted she is speaking to experienced persons, she does not always explain exactly what she means; but she says it as well as she can, for God has communicated great and lofty things through the weakness of her expression, lest too great exactitude should lead to doubt as to whether it was really a woman who wrote. Moreover she wrote rather to confirm those

whom heaven teaches directly, than for those scholars who, seeking an exact knowledge of heavenly things, only aim at being able in their role as doctors, to make them intelligible to those who know nothing about them and whom God wishes to instruct through masters; not, as St. Teresa intends, to allow them to be savoured by those who already know them.

It follows that, her method of writing and choosing her material being neither premeditated nor self-chosen, she groups many things together which ought to be considered separately if they are to be really understood, and that sometimes that which follows is so different from that which precedes it that there are rather two distinct subjects than one continuous subject; our Saint allowing herself more often to be led by God, than to follow out her own thought.

Now, instead of realizing this method of writing, many in reading the works of St. Teresa connect things which are separated and divide things which are united; that is why there are only two kinds of people who ought to read the luminous parts of her works, those who have experience and who distinguish the ways of God in themselves by a naïve representation of that which they possess, and those who are learned in mystical matters and weigh things rather than words. All others who read the works of St. Teresa only confuse or deceive themselves about things which are beyond their vocation and their powers. I except certain very humble souls—they are indeed very few—who, taking profit from everything, humbling themselves and at the same time rejoicing before God at the sight of those high truths, bless the Divine Majesty equally for those things they do not understand, but which others whom they esteem better than themselves savour and practise.



The zeal of St. Teresa, of which we have spoken, also causes a holy confusion in these matters; because from time to time she is caught up to God: sometimes, too, she makes long digressions which are outside her subject, as if she had forgotten what she was writing about and had lost the thread of her discourse. All this confuses and bewilders those who read without close attention, without experience, or without doctrine. She also indulges in repetitions, and one deceives oneself in taking these as different subjects, instead of which they are the same thoughts, which love or necessity have applied differently.

But I return to your question, and will explain things in such a way that you will be able to respond fully to all the teachings of St. Teresa and to hold them in their purity. The suspension of which she writes, *Philothea*, is a voluntary cessation of all operations of the soul. This suspension is either total or partial. Total suspension is an absolute cessation of all operations of the soul that we can produce by our own industry. Such cessation occurs in sleep, in ecstasy, or in great weakness. Partial suspension is a cessation of some faculty of the soul; at one time of the understanding, when the will acts alone; at another of the will, when our reasoning faculties cease; at another time of the memory, when we no longer act through remembrance. This particular suspension occurs even in the acts of civil life according to the need we have of it, the soul not being able to attend to two acts and two things at the same time, even although it passes in a moment from the one to the other with such facility that one would say it exercised all its faculties at once. Thus in prayer, when we meditate, the will is at rest; when the will draws the affections, the understanding is suspended; when we receive the memory of a mystery, the two other faculties await their object; and yet we



exercise all the faculties at the same time and on the same point.

As for the total suspension of all the faculties of the soul, if it is not occasioned by any natural cause, such as sleep, or any violent cause, such as illness, or any extraordinary cause, such as ecstasy, it is certain that it is very difficult to achieve; owing to the fact that, the external senses being open to external things, images are continually entering in by them which engage the incredible vivacity of our minds. For even when the senses are lulled, the faculties do not cease to act and to exert themselves. The same may even be said of the effort we make to repress all the operations of the soul, an effort which does but excite and provoke them by stimulating the brain; so that if we are not sent to sleep by this mental effort, it is impossible to control it, and the soul continues active in its sensitive and spiritual faculties.

This suspension, Philothea, is also very useless, because in order to gain merit it is necessary to act, to hope, to love; and these actions cannot be exercised by a soul which is suspended. It is a loss of time, a pernicious extinction of the lights of the soul, and a cessation of the legitimate use for which it has been created, which is to know and to love.

Finally, this suspension is too dangerous, because the extreme violence one must bring to the establishing of it can at once throw a person into trance or madness, weakening or damaging the brain, more or less seriously, according to the nature and temperament of each one.

Let me say further, Philothea, that such suspension is accompanied by presumption, because the soul, remaining inactive and benumbed in itself, nevertheless awaits miracles and illuminations from on high, and offers to God in exchange for His graces nothing but a soft and lethargic idleness.

These are the things St. Teresa rebukes, when she speaks of a "bad" or "false" suspension, and we rebuke and condemn them with her. But the suspension which is practised in the exercise of contemplation is not a suspension of the faculties of the soul; for the understanding is occupied with the presence of God, the will is inflamed by His love, the memory recalls His perfection. All this takes place in an immediate, lively and gentle way, the understanding being the motive power, the will and the memory letting themselves go without effort and almost without application, at the impulse of the understanding. Just as when the surface of the sea has been struck by a stone, one circle produces another circle, and others follow from the impulse of the first; even so, the soul is not purely suspended by the act of contemplation, but gently and imperceptibly plunged in its object.

*Philothea.* Yet it does seem to me that this void of every sort of image is a suspension.

*Director.* It is true that it is a suspension, but it is a suspension of distinct and particular acts, in order to give place to a general and universal act of the presence of God; thus the soul is always occupied and always filled. It is to suspend a lesser good for a more perfect good; or to express it better, it is to free the soul from the weight of its many thoughts and reasonings, to enlighten and purify it rather than to suspend it.

But, Philothea, the souls which are not called to this exercise, or who do not understand how to achieve it, do themselves great violence in order to attain it; they worry and vex their spirit horribly, in order to arrest it and suspend it in spite of itself, urged by envy of those who contemplate wholesomely; and after judging others by their own experience, they call contemplation a suspension, a perpetual distraction, a vexation, a laziness, a

drowsiness—and a hundred other names which merely mark their own inquietude or little intelligence.

*Philothea.* Is the soul passive in contemplation, or only active?

*Director.* To be passive is to receive something in oneself in such a way that one does not contribute either to the receiving or the producing of it. Thus we say that wood is passive in regard to fire, because it receives in itself the action of the fire, and does not produce it. Air is passive as regards light; a canvas on which we paint a picture, is passive as regards the brush; seeing that the air makes no action in order to receive light, and the canvas does not bestir itself to receive the picture about to be painted on it. The soul, therefore, will be purely passive if it does not accompany the impression it receives with any movement, but allows itself to be acted upon without doing anything of itself, except giving itself up and abandoning itself to the agent.

But in the things of God, the soul may be considered passive in two ways: passive as regards principle, and passive as regards action. As to the first, we say that a soul is passive in regard to the grace which causes it to act, more especially as such grace is not a natural or acquired principle, but a principle purely infused, by the help of which the soul produces actions just and agreeable to God. We say also that it is passive as regards faith, because faith is an infused light which is not produced by the operations of the soul, but by the help of which the soul believes that which is above both nature and reason.

Regarding this you will observe, *Philothea*, that two things contribute to the action of the soul; a faculty, and a related principle which determines this faculty and the kind of act. For him who wishes to produce philosophic reasoning it is not enough that he should possess the



faculty of understanding; it is necessary that he should also have the habit of philosophic thinking, in order to produce his reasoning with understanding. And for him who wishes to reason about worldly things, or about his own family, it is necessary that, as well as understanding, he should also have sufficient knowledge of the things of which he wishes to reason. In the same way, he who wishes to reason about God must have knowledge of God to serve as the principle of his reasoning. If this knowledge is acquired by science, it is a principle which the soul has built up for itself by a succession of acts, and so we do not say that the soul must be passive in order to possess such a principle, for it has not received it, it has formed it. But when God through His liberality gratuitously communicates to the soul a ray which passes, or even a light which remains, or some other excellent gift, by the help of which the soul afterwards produces thoughts and affections which are conformed to His grace, then the soul is passive as far as the principle is concerned; it has not produced it from its own depths, it has received it.

The soul may be considered passive, in the second place, as regards the action; this will be so if the action of the soul is produced by God in the soul, without the soul contributing anything to it. For example, if God, besides the principle of faith which He has communicated to the soul, produced in it also the acts by which it believes, and if, besides the supernatural quality of charity, He produced also in it acts of love, then the soul would be passive both as regards principles and actions. Now, Philothea, the general opinion of theologians accepts the first manner in which the soul is passive; recognizing an infinity of supernatural help, whether in the act itself or in the habit, both of which are given gratuitously to the soul in the order of its salvation, and in the production of which it has no

part, they being produced in it without its help. God regards it as a precious vase, into which He pours all that He pleases. But as for the actions which the soul produces following those supernatural principles, they are purely the actions of the soul; it is the soul which conceives them and forms them, and it is truly not passive, save as regards the principle. It is not possible that God should supply such actions, for they are vital actions without which the soul would not differ from a tree-trunk, or a marble. For otherwise one would have to say that it was God who reasoned and not the soul; that it was God who believed and loved, and not the soul. And this would not be pleasing to God, who wills to be loved by the soul; nor to the soul which cannot love if it does not produce the act of love. But all this does not prevent us from saying that good and supernatural actions are entirely the actions of God and entirely the actions of the soul: entirely of God, because He alone communicates the supernatural principle; entirely of the soul because the soul, given the help of the principle, produces its act of itself, and this is called co-operation with God.

It appears therefore, Philothea, that God produces all the supernatural principles of action; applies, determines, fortifies, urges, and elevates the soul at the time and in the manner which seems good to Him, according to the soul's need and capacity. But the soul always produces its actions with a determination on its part, with care, gentleness, and liberty, power to act or not to act, conformably with its elevation and its state; it being impossible either to borrow or to communicate its own proper action. Thus God may well supply all the principles but not all the actions.

The most sane and reasonable theologians concur in this line of thought. They even quote, in this connection, the



example of the beatific vision; where the soul, after having been reclothed in light and glory and raised to a state in which it is in complete union with God, once supposing this elevation, knows God by its own knowledge, loves Him with its own love, adores Him, praises Him, glorifies Him by actions which are entirely its own. If this can take place in a state of beatitude in which the soul is so strongly drawn away from its own natural state, then with more reason can the soul act by its own actions in all the states of grace, however lofty they can possibly be, and it is then only moved and actuated by God as a help and aid to its own efforts.<sup>1</sup>

This doctrine being thus established, I say that if contemplation is supernatural, the soul is passive in the exercise of contemplation because of the principle of the gift or of the help which is infused in it, whether actually or habitually. But if the contemplation is only acquired, that is to say if it is a habit of holding oneself in the presence of God, with more or less facility according to the progress of each soul, then the soul is not passive, because its principle is produced and acquired in its own depths and is nothing but a habit of regarding God always present.

It is very true that even in acquired contemplation, there are two supernatural states: grace, which draws us and solicits us to regard God Present, and faith, which furnishes us with motives so to do and light to hold us there; but this grace is not, properly speaking, the habit of contemplation, neither is faith, properly speaking, contemplation. These are only the supernatural virtues which accompany and fortify contemplation, just as the

<sup>1</sup> This long and perfectly orthodox passage, with its careful discriminations, ought to be enough by itself to defend Malaval from the charge of quietism. It states the principles which govern the whole of his teaching; and should be borne in mind when judging the significance of isolated references to passive prayer.



same grace and faith help us on the countless other occasions in which we act by our own habits. For contemplation, to be entirely supernatural, must be so, not only in its motive and in its *attrait*, but also in its habit; which is a quality infused by God, independent of the soul as much in the manner of its production as in the manner of its action. Or at least the soul must sometimes receive supernatural help which raises it, even if the habit has not yet been given to it.

*Philothea.* I have understood two things, it seems to me, from what you have just said. The first is that of ourselves we can produce nothing of the supernatural, unless a supernatural principle is communicated to us, but also that by means of this principle the acts of the understanding and the will are our own. That helps me to understand those passages in St. Paul, where he says that we cannot think anything ourselves as of ourselves, and that we cannot even pronounce the name of Jesus, except with the help of the Spirit of God. By which the Apostle means to say that we require a permanent gift, or at least an actual grace, to raise our souls, which are merely passive and receptive in regard to this supernatural aid, but that following this gift or grace they act, love, think, by their own proper action.

And I realize now much more clearly the difference between the two kinds of contemplation; the one is a supernatural and gratuitous gift, the other an acquired habit accompanied by these two supernatural conditions, grace which draws us and faith which furnishes the matter and the motives for putting us in the presence of God.

But alas! my Father, how this teaching bars the way to the solution of many of the difficulties which have been put before me. Some say that if contemplation is a gift of God, it is foolishness to aspire to it through mere

method; others insist that there can be thus no exercise of contemplation.

But is it necessary that a spiritual person should recognize in himself when contemplation is supernatural and when it is acquired?

*Director.* No, Philothea, that distinct feeling is not at all necessary; the nature of the contemplation cannot even be discerned by natural signs. The knowledge a soul would have of its own elevation might lead it into pride and cause it to lose all its favours. Neither would its faith be so greatly exercised, and moreover, such actual knowledge, making it see its obligations very clearly, would cause it to make too great efforts to comply with these obligations, or else would throw it into despair of ever being able to co-operate faithfully. That is why God so wisely directs the work of our salvation that He takes us by the hand without letting us see the way He is leading us, save what is necessary and according to the capacity of each one.

The Saviour of the world made Himself known to the Jews, yet nevertheless He always hid Himself from them. He let them know His wonderful charity and His vast knowledge, which penetrated right into their hearts; and He showed them the power He had over all creatures, which was manifested by an infinite number of miracles. All this was more than sufficient to convince the Jews that He was a man sent by God, who would do them all manner of good and who could not be associated with any sort of evil.

But as they did not respond to those powerful demonstrations they did not deserve to advance farther, and they themselves obstructed, by their hardness of heart, the channel of grace which would have made them aware that Christ was the veritable Son of God and would have

let them recognize without trouble all the express signs He gave them of His Divinity, which they took instead for so many impostures and lies. But God made use of their affected ignorance to allow Himself to be crucified by them; which would otherwise have been inexcusable for the reasons I have alleged.

God does not always make use of the sin of man in order to hide Himself from them; He sometimes uses His absolute will. The Blessed Virgin, even although she was raised in grace above all the just in the whole universe, did not learn that she was destined to be the Mother of God, till the moment of the Incarnation, which she shows quite plainly by her astonishment. And the Apostles, according to the beautiful reflection of St. Chrysostom, after having heard the doctrine of Jesus Christ, who called them His friends because He revealed to them the secrets of His Father, and even after the Holy Spirit had descended on them in a torrent of wisdom and light, did not yet know that the redemption was for the Gentiles, till St. Peter had had the vision of the sheet full of serpents, and till he declared to the others the design of God. So true is it that God does not give us the knowledge of all that He intends to do with us, or in us, even although we may receive illuminations and lights which lead us insensibly towards the goal to which He proposes to lead us. Just as the great graces of the Blessed Virgin led her secretly to her maternity, and as divers teachings of Jesus Christ scattered through the Gospel sufficiently conveyed to the Apostles the doctrine of a general redemption, when it had not yet dawned on them, and was as yet an utter mystery to them.

All the just are dealt with in this manner. "No one knows," says the sage, "whether he is worthy of hatred or of love." Even St. Thomas, the Angel of the Schools,



so eminent in graces and lights, yet doubted whether God had pardoned his sins; and that was one of the things he wished to know from his sister, who appeared to him after her death bearing the marks of her glory and her joy.

So that if grace, which is the portion of all the just, and without which no one can call himself a child of God, is not recognized by those who possess it, even although it is this grace in them which makes them active in every good work, according to these words of the Apostle, *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*; if grace is not recognized, one must not presume that supernatural contemplation will be recognized with the necessary clearness by those to whom God communicates it. The more so, that if it is the gift of wisdom, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which more particularly exercises its influence on the soul, one would infallibly recognize grace in recognizing such a gift which is inseparable from it; or, if as some think, it is a gift distinguished from the seven others, it is, nevertheless, always a gift from God which is incompatible with mortal sin, and, in consequence of which one would always take for granted that one was in the grace of God. This is not, of course, necessary for the good of man; who to the end must work out his salvation with fear and trembling.

Never ask, therefore, whether your contemplation is acquired or whether it is supernatural, but co-operate faithfully with the Spirit of God which "bloweth where it listeth," according to the Gospel; you will never know whence it came nor whither it goeth. For, Philothea, if the just knew whence the spirit came which moves them and impels them, they would know assuredly that it was the Spirit of God, seeing that the Spirit of God can only come from God.

It follows from that also that the same effects which

derive from supernatural contemplation, may derive from acquired contemplation, for we see that all the virtues which compose the body of sanctity are conferred by God by different means. Some souls obtain all their graces through prayer, others through penitence, others by the frequent receiving of the Holy Sacrament, others by the faithful exercise of a particular virtue, such as chastity, patience, gentleness, charity towards the poor, or some other virtue which draws all blessings down upon them. In the same way, that which God gives gratuitously, following the gift of infused contemplation, He may also give by way of reward for the exercise of acquired contemplation; which, as I will presently show you, is of even greater merit, even although it is a great good to have supernatural contemplation.

It is for the same reason that the signs of acquired contemplation, which we discussed in the previous dialogue, are not different from those of supernatural contemplation; both of them suppose vocation, tend towards the same end, and may produce the same effects.

It is true that as sanctifying grace, which cannot be recognized by infallible signs, may be recognized by reasonable and moral conjectures, infused contemplation also has signs by which we may recognize in some measure that it resides in the soul. A gentle, strong, and continuous presence of God; a profound peace amidst the affairs and distractions of the world; an influx of love and light on occasions on which thoughts and affections present themselves spontaneously, without trouble and without being sought after; detachment from things of the world which fortifies the sense of presence; and, finally, a powerful *attrait* which leads us to recollection—these are some of the easily recognized signs of contemplation. But each one must rather recognize it in others than in himself and



act sincerely and without reflection, seeking with all his strength to love God, holding himself in His presence, and desiring to live unknown to himself.

*Philothea.* Certainly, provided that we do ascend towards heaven we need never look to see whether the steps are of marble or concrete; it matters only that we continue to ascend by whatever means it may be. I remember, when we were children, we used to have little feasts on leaden plates and dishes, and we thought our sweets as delicious as if they had been served on silver vessels. God will attract me to Himself in the way that pleases Him; He does not tell me to examine His *attrait*, but to follow it faithfully; I was created for nothing but to obey Him.

*Director.* This is, moreover, the ordinary procedure of God—though His supreme will does not bind itself to proceed always in the same way—that souls pass from meditation to affective prayer, from affective prayer to ordinary contemplation, from ordinary contemplation to infused contemplation, one kind of prayer thus serving as a step and disposition to the other.

*Philothea.* Is it possible that infused and acquired contemplation may be met with together in the same person?

*Director.* I have already shown you sufficiently how difficult it would be to distinguish the one from the other, and I have no doubt at all that they can occur together. We see that reason often exercises itself over the objects of faith because faith does not destroy the exercise of reason; there is, therefore, no difficulty in believing that one can contemplate by an acquired habit when one aims at the same end, as when one contemplates by a supernatural gift, God Himself raising us up to do so; it being clearly evident that infused help communicates a certain suppleness and facility to the understanding which



remain with it even during the natural acts it produces. We resist temptations against purity in our dreams at night, by a habit of resisting thoughts and desires of the flesh impressed upon our nature during the day; such resistance emanating from grace. We sometimes frame, in sleep, involuntary acts of the love of God, of adoration and compunction; thus nature takes pleasure in showing us a picture of all the actions grace has traced in our souls. So that when the spirit is free and detached from the mists of sleep, it has more strength and vigour to imitate the Divine operations by efforts proportionate to its capacity and accompanied by a sincere intention to do everything within its own power, and not to try to equal what God does. Our natural liberty renders itself even more perfect when we obey the movements of grace, the more that the passions, which are the usual ties and hindrances of this liberty, remain more tranquil and more mortified by the exercise of obedience which immolates them. He, Philothea, who occasionally drinks of an exquisite and delicious wine, does not, for that reason, lose his taste for water. God, to try or to humiliate a soul, may suspend the influence of supernatural contemplation; and St. Augustine, even although he had been plunged long before in the delights of celestial contemplation, does not cease to protest in the Preface to his *Manual* that he composed that work to re-inflame his tepidity and to re-launch his spirit in God, when he should be turned away from Him. The Apostles, walking one Sabbath Day through the fields with the Saviour of the world and being reduced to hunger, did not wait for a miracle to revive them, but set themselves to pluck the ears of corn and eat the grain. When good souls have not heavenly bread in their hands, they return humbly to ordinary bread and thus regain, by the humility of

this exercise, that which they had lost by their own infidelity or by a Divine dispensation. It happens sometimes to certain souls to be reduced to powerlessness to use their habitual contemplation, whether such powerlessness arises from an introversion which binds the faculties, or from an *attrait* of the Spirit of God which, though it leaves the soul full liberty and power of action, yet commands it interiorly to remain inactive. But such a state is an extraordinary state, and it is very necessary, before accepting it as such, to make great efforts to see whether it really comes from God, for fear of encouraging our laziness or our pride by presuming we possess such a grace.

## DIALOGUE IV

*That God, pure and ineffable, abstracted from all particular thought, is the object of perfect contemplation, even although, when we so desire, we can contemplate other Divine things.*

*Philothea.* What joy it is to contemplate the God of gentleness, and to press closely to our hearts by holy charity, the Infinite Object of our love! He who could think incessantly of God or receive all other thoughts in His presence, would have found Paradise on earth and would never be crushed under the weight of earthly things. I know this truth very well, yet I am so unfortunate that my own weakness makes me more afraid than true confidence in God makes me courageous. I raise myself up to God, and afterwards all at once I fall back on myself, and from the moment that I begin to delight in God; an uprising of nature comes to trouble my joy; some worldly sound disturbs my peace; some importunate creature snatches from my mouth the morsel of honey I was about to eat. Happy are those who are dead to all things, who do not feel the pricks of the world, and never turn away from the embraces of the Beloved, whatever noise and tumult may be going on around their hearts. But, Father, those who take from me the sensible sweetness of my peace are powerless to take from me the faith which produces it, and I remain invariably united and attached to my God by His continual presence, even though such people cry out from time to time: "Where is now your God? Can God be your familiar and present object in this earthly life? No one has ever known God in



Himself, but always some work of God. God Pure can only be the object of the blessed. It is an extreme of temerity to consider Him in this life, apart from our terms and reasonings, and to wish to savour that which God is not, seeing that we can taste at our ease that which He appears to be in creatures."<sup>1</sup> I assure you, Father, in the presence of God, that such talk mortifies me, not indeed for myself, but for many others. Because, for all the subtlety of such people, I do not leave God and God does not leave me; and I say in a transport: "All men are liars," if truth does not itself teach them. And truth never teaches those who inflate themselves with passions, not even those who so inflate themselves in defence of the truth. It is a strange thing that those who disagree with me would like me to believe that I did not see the sun, just because there are people who do not see it. They tell me that my contemplation is a chimera, because one cannot conceive it without images; and what is more wonderful is that, enjoying great peace and profound tranquillity as I assure them, they undertake to persuade me that it is not true that I enjoy this peace, and that if I wish to acquire it, I must always meditate, always think, always act.

*Director.* Once and for all, Philothea, you must bear with those who teach the contrary of what you, with many others, enjoy, and with those who believe them. Desire for the one and for the other with all your heart the plenitude of God, for which such people wish to substitute good thoughts and holy images; pray God that He may make them taste in the spirit of truth that which has become in their eyes a thing of bitterness and reproach. Instead, you speak against such people; who, to my mind,

<sup>1</sup> "To taste that which God is not" refers to the Dionysian negative path of contemplation, as opposed to the worship of God as revealed in His attributes and works.

in spite of what they say, do not cease to be good and well intentioned.

*Philothea.* I can only answer you in the words of the Magdalene: "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him: tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." My Lord is unchangeable; and they would not have me regard Him save under some change, some figure. When I tell them that I love Him; that I adore all the changes He has undergone and all the forms He has taken for love of us; and that in the midst of those changes and those forms we discover a God who is pure, who is one, who is ineffable, and that we may taste Him perfectly in Himself, without its being always necessary to have recourse to these pious variations—then they say to me that this is impossible. As for me, Father, I cannot understand why they say it.

*Director.* It is a sound opinion in faith, in theology, and in reason, that one can have a concept of God without considering Him under any of His attributes.

Scripture teaches us in the third chapter of Exodus that God, wishing to send Moses to the Children of Israel, names Himself thus, *I am that I am*, and that he afterwards repeated it to Moses: "Thou must speak thus to the Children of Israel, *I AM hath sent me to you.*" There is no attribute of God, Philothea, to which one can reduce this ineffable expression, *I am that I am*. God wished to signify not only to Moses, who was at that time their Legislator and Governor, but also through him to the Children of Israel, that the God whom they adored was Essential Being, and not simply a good Being, a wise Being, a powerful Being, or a perfect Being, but Absolute Being, the Being in whom every being and every perfection is comprehended.

Would it not seem that God should have made Himself

known to the people of Israel rather by a title of power, seeing that He had to rescue them from the captivity of the Egyptians; or by a title of goodness, seeing that He wished to lead them to the Promised Land by so many miracles and favours; or finally by a title of wisdom, seeing that He was about to overthrow the artifices and the power of Pharaoh? But He says nevertheless in one word, by this adorable expression, all that He is, in order powerfully and suddenly to arouse the faith of Israel, who had not known Him up to then save under shadows and figures; who had only heard Him called the God of Abraham and of Jacob; and at that time found themselves amongst ridiculous idolators who yet nevertheless were the wisest and most learned people of the world—for Moses himself is praised for having been instructed in the wisdom of Egypt. They had, therefore, need of an idea of the Divine which would abase in their spirits all images, whether false or true, and which would represent to them a grandeur with which nothing created or conceived by the human spirit could be compared. For there is nothing but God which could be *I AM*; creatures are not the Being who is, but that which they have received from the First Being. In consequence, Philothea, all the thoughts of God which are borrowed from expressions or comparisons with created things, can never arrive at this noble expression of the First Being, however lofty they may be. And the expressions, “the power of God,” “the wisdom of God,” “the goodness of God,” do not at all signify *He who is*, because, after our human and limited manner of conceiving, each attribute of the Divine is conceived separately in our minds, and one of those conceptions does not at all represent to us what another represents; but *He who is* comprises all that He is and all that we can conceive of His perfections.



This great Name was revealed to Moses before the Law, because it is more excellent than all the terms of the Law and the Prophets, and because the Law and the Prophets explained nothing but this Name. Now when the contemplative soul, raised by a movement of grace, represents God in Himself without any express or distinct notion, it says this Sovereign Name without saying it; the more that it proposes to regard God Perfect, Infinite, and separated from every created thing, which could not be done save by this universal concept of the Being of Beings; an idea which in a short time is no longer an idea but a taste; no longer a thought but an experience; no longer a significant expression but a satisfying sentiment, a vivifying light, a knowledge wholly effective, and wholly affective, and neither dry nor scholastic, as many people imagine it to be. It is the same scriptural sense of this expression that St. Thomas proves in his *Summa*, Part I, Question 13, Article 11; that this name is particularly suited to God for three reasons. First, because it signifies Being, in so far as it is convertible with the Essence of God which is His being. I will explain myself further, Philothea. When we say *He who is*, we can never mean anything but God, just as when we say *God* we can only mean *He who is*. We cannot say the same of the perfections of God; for even though God is powerful, even though He is good, we cannot affirm for that reason by a reciprocal proposition, that that which is good is God, that that which is powerful is God, the more that there are good and powerful beings who are not God. But when we say *He who is*, it is necessarily God we mean and not any other Being, for nothing in the world is *He who is*, but every creature which is produced is only that which God has made it under finite and determinate conditions. In just the same way that we say that light is not something illumined,

nor heat something hot, but each one of those qualities is a separate quality, and natural bodies receive them by participation; that is why they are illumined and yet are not light, why they are heated and yet are not heat.

All this leads us naturally to the second reason St. Thomas gives us for the fitness of this name, and that is that it signifies absolute Being without its being limited by any form or notion, as it would be if we said, "He who is immense" or "He who is infinite"; for to be immense or to be infinite is not to be at all; it is being limited to immensity or infinity. That which signifies immensity does not signify infinity and that which signifies infinity does not signify immensity. But he who says *He who is* says and comprehends in this term all that He is.

St. Thomas gives a third excellent reason for this ineffable name, and that is that it signifies the present, and not the past nor the future. For *He who is* is not He who has been nor He who will be; He is an unchangeable Being who is Himself His measure and His eternity; from whom the past takes nothing and to whom the future brings nothing; who finds in Himself all that He has produced and who already contains in Himself all that He ever will produce. So that in saying *He who is*, we express all creatures in Him, of which the particular creatures which pass away are in God an unchangeable verity, which does not pass away. We also express God present in all creatures, creating them, preserving them, concurring with their actions, and yet not passing away when they pass away, not receiving anything new when they are produced, and not awaiting anything more perfect when they are still to come.

May Thy Name be sanctified, O Thou who art! Sanctify our nothingness to the end that our thoughts may be reduced to silence, to adoration, to love. For

to what can we compare Thee? I adore Thee, O Thou who art! I rejoice and I glorify Thee that Thou art *He who is* and that Thy creatures are nothing in themselves. I rejoice that nothing can equal Thee, that nothing can express Thee, that nothing can praise Thee, but Thyself. And even when I say in my heart, *He who is*, I aim at nothing but preserving in myself the faith of that which Thou art, in forgetting the name, seeing that I believe Thee to be infinitely lovable, infinitely incomprehensible.

*Philothea.* There are certainly few people who esteem God in the manner in which one can esteem Him in this world. We behave as we did to those savages who used to give us their pearls and gold in exchange for glass beads; we did not pay them at all for what they gave us, and we satisfied our greed at the expense of their simplicity. We would treat God in the same way, when we aspire to equal His dignity or try to represent to ourselves His greatness. It is not that His Divine Majesty despises His little creatures, nor that He spurns the gifts proportionate to their sufficiency, for God rewards humility by knowledge of the truth; but He disdains those who remain incessantly abased because of a criminal laziness to raise themselves, who bury their talent of faith in an abyss of reasons and conceptions, and who, having been created to be the image of God, leave God and retain the image. There are wise and prudent followers of Christianity who do not understand that their wisdom is ignorance before God, and their prudence a lawless captivity; whereas, ignorance humbly accepted is true wisdom, and an utter abandonment of self and of one's own reason true prudence. I am not troubled about those who meditate with humility, but about those who refuse ever to humble themselves by meditation, and who in order to say simply, *My God!*



*Be merciful unto me!* must always advance reasons and motives why they should receive mercy, as if they wanted to convince God, and who can never pray to God without speaking much to Him.

But now, Father, I have interrupted the thread of your discourse; continue, I pray you, to show me how one can regard God without any distinct notion and explain to me the other beauties of this Name.

*Director.* I am very glad you have made such a useful digression, Philothea, and while what I say sheds some light on your mind, I see with joy that it also inflames your heart. For, after all, why talk of God if not to make Him beloved?

You have seen by the teaching we have established, that we can contemplate God without always having a distinct idea of His perfections. There is nothing in the world which can call itself *He who is*; there are no thoughts whose terms respond to so high and lofty an idea, and yet, as I have said to you, this idea, in dying away, transforms itself in the contemplative into something real and permanent which fills the soul with the being of God in a very excellent way, and which embraces all perfection in the universal idea with which it enriches the soul. A Prophet was in bygone days commanded to eat a book, and theologians still call wisdom a "savouring of knowledge," and so this thought of God is the taste, the support, and nourishment of the soul, and *He who is* vivifies him who is not.

Here is another proof of this doctrine taken from the book of Genesis. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," says the Scripture. God is therefore neither heaven nor earth nor anything contained in heaven or earth, angels or men. All our most universal and most sublime terms have some relation to that which God has

created, and in consequence He cannot be expressed by our terms. If we contemplate Him as good or powerful, we mark the relation He has to created things; or, if you wish, the relation He does not have, as when we say that He is not finite, not changeable, not subject to time. Such contemplation may be practised in a most praiseworthy and useful way, but that is not to contemplate God Pure and solely in Himself; that is not to represent to ourselves the Being of Beings; it is to limit Him by a conception which has a necessary relation to created things.

*Philothea.* But does that not also happen when we conceive God as *He who is*? Does not some particular thought or some special time always limit Him?

*Director.* It is certainly true that our thoughts, however vast they may be, always limit our ideas by some particular words or notions; but here the significance of this name is infinite and universal. Moreover, our intention is not to limit our conception; and, after all, this conception of God loses itself and is absorbed in a sweet tasting of God; which, without leaving the terms in the spirit, leaves it the spirit of the terms, which is to contemplate God in Himself. Those words, *God is, He is who He is*, composed of letters and syllables, resemble the shell which we discard when we eat the nut; they are like the chariot of fire in which Elijah was transported; there was no longer any need for it from the time that he had arrived at the place in which God had resolved to establish him.

After we have often represented to ourselves that God is all, we remain all in God without representing this to ourselves; and when we represent it to ourselves again, we do not raise ourselves to a state in which we have never been, but confirm ourselves in the state in which we were before.

You need not, then, have any fears about limiting God;

it is an indispensable necessity to make use of a finite term; but the intention and the significance perfect our object; and grace, while allowing the intention and significance to die away, leaves the object in its plenitude.

*Philothea.* When we raise ourselves by goodness or by power, do we not raise ourselves by an object which is infinite? seeing that this very thought of goodness and power, when it passes, has made us taste God just as much as the general concept of which you spoke?

*Director.* It is true, Philothea, that goodness and power are infinite; but neither goodness nor power represent *all* that God is; which caused a certain famous man—it was Cardinal Cajetan—to say that God was infinitely infinite in infinite perfections. But the thought we form of one of His perfections limits Him to that perfection. That is why, in order to contemplate Him as worthily as we know how, we represent Him to ourselves under the most general concept we can conceive, that concept most separated from all created things. So that, commencing to raise ourselves by thoughts of His goodness or His power, we lose ourselves all at once in Him, in losing the particular thought by which we raised ourselves. We thus enter into real and simple contemplation. We are then like divers, who, not wishing to plunge at first deep down into the sea, whether from lack of courage or just because such is their pleasure, first make one or two tentative trials in the water and then plunge into the depths with all their might when one least expects it. One can thus lose oneself in God by the consideration of an attribute or even of a mystery or a creature, whether because one is not sufficiently accustomed to the universal concept of the pure Divinity or whether one acts thus in order to obey the *attrait* one is conscious of towards some particular attribute. But all the same it is true that the



object of simple and perfect contemplation is God alone, and that thus a universal concept is a more direct way of going to the absolute God than a particular concept, even though one can raise oneself to Him by a particular concept. It is in this sense we should understand the passage in Ecclesiasticus that "the end of prayer is better than the beginning"; because the beginning is made by a movement of thought, whether universal or particular, and the end of the movement is rest in God.

But here, Philothea, are other reasons which convince the spirit that it can consider God in Himself. The Apostles' Creed, which is so familiar to Christians, distinguishes from its first article the essence of God, His persons, His attributes, and His works. *I believe in God*, that is His nature: *The Father*, these are the Persons: *Almighty*, the attributes: *Maker of heaven and earth*, the works. It is therefore certain that people can represent to themselves the nature of God without considering His perfections; for when a child replies that the Father is God, that the Son is God, that the Holy Spirit is God, that these are not three Gods but one God in three Persons, he conceives something as great and august as his capacities allow, even if he conceives it confusedly. He cannot, of course, conceive the whole power or quality of the Creator, but his general idea grows and perfects itself little by little according to his faith and knowledge.

In theology we distinguish the essence from the attributes, and we define precisely something in which the essence consists. And even though the sense conveyed may differ, because we do not possess words which adequately convey the idea of the Divine nature, they all agree nevertheless in this, that the nature of God, according to our conception, comes before the perfections of God, and that to be God and to be good is not the

same conception, even though all that is in God is God, without any distinction. Ordinary people, Philothea, put this more familiarly, for they form an idea of all that they know of God, the most perfect and the most excellent Being they can conceive, and they base their belief on this idea sustained by faith, when they invoke Him and when they adore Him, without troubling to distinguish anything in particular.

Moreover, St. Thomas, speaking not of Christians only but of all men, says that we have all instinctively a vague knowledge of the existence of God. Here are his own words: "It is a thing instinctively imprinted on our spirits to know under some universal term and in a vague manner that God is, in so far as God is the Beatitude of man. Because man instinctively desires his happiness, and that which man instinctively desires he must instinctively know" (*Summa*: Part I, Question 2, Article 1).

What would you not say of a Christian assisted by the lights of faith and the influence of grace, when the Gospel says he must love God above all things, with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength? It does not add, because He is good, or because He is holy, but supposes in this idea a Perfect Being who expresses all those excellencies.

We see also that contrition is taught to all Christians in this way; to detest sin because it offends a God infinitely good. This does not signify precisely that we must detest sin because God has infinite goodness towards creatures, though we can add this consideration to the others; but that sin is to be detested because God is infinitely good in Himself. But what is it, I ask you, that we call infinitely good in Himself? It is something that an ignorant person cannot understand; and consequently it is rather calculated—and this is the intention of contrition—to lead



a soul to consider God as infinitely good without any distinct notion; which is to consider God in Himself. From which you can see that, apart from this condition of God offended, the object of contemplation becomes the same as that of contrition. That is to say, God considered in Himself and for Himself. This manner of considering God in Himself is suited to the strong and the weak, to the sincerely ignorant and to the humbly wise, for good sense enlightened by faith stays itself on God because He is all. Humble wisdom, knowing that all we know of God is as nothing, and submitting all that it does know, plunges itself by faith into all that He is.

From which comes this fine saying of St. Augustine in the book against Adimantus, that *the Holy Spirit wishing to declare the ineffable things of the Divine, has used expressions which are borrowed from the faults and weaknesses of men*; as when it says *that God repents, that He is angry, that He is touched with compassion*, and other similar expressions which surprised you, Philothea; they seem to charge God with our weaknesses and miseries, but they have been used thus in order that the indignity of such expressions, of which men are forced to make use in order to express themselves, may make them understand that there is nothing more worthy of God than their silence. Thus when God made Himself man, He spoke like men, but when He wished to make men gods, He reduced them to Divine silence.

In fact, in the whole of the Song of Songs, which contains the most lofty communications between God and the soul, between God and the Church, between God and the humanity of Jesus Christ, according to the three senses in which it is explained, we find nothing but similitudes taken from gardens, pasturages, and the most ordinary everyday things connected with shepherds, in



order to teach us that it is more necessary to pay attention to that which God communicates to the soul than that which is expressed in the Song, and that the farther the words were separated from the Majesty of God, the nearer the interior sense approached Him. If God chose comparisons taken from very lofty things, we might think that there might be some proportion between these lofty things and God; but we suspect nothing of that kind from humble and rustic expressions. One would think, on the contrary, that the more God disguised Himself, the more He would hide Himself, just as it would be easier to recognize a great king under the dress of a simple gentleman than under that of a valet. But seeing that only the humblest spirits appreciate the sublimity of the Divine operation, God makes use of the humblest and most simple language, which is only to be understood by the humble in spirit.

There is therefore nothing, Philothea, which expresses God more perfectly and more nobly than silence; for on the one hand, sublime expressions might lead us to conceive some proportion between the finite and the infinite; while on the other hand, humble words might drive away such thoughts altogether, if God Himself did not furnish them only to absorb them at once. After silence only love knows how to speak worthily of God, and there is nothing but love which understands that which love says. But love neither speaks nor understands save when our knowledge has ceased, and when we of ourselves renounce it by abandoning our minds to God, according to the *attrait* of each one.

We may conclude, therefore, that the object of perfect contemplation is God sought in interior silence; but God experienced, God tasted, God drawing us, God raising us up in a very pure and very spiritual manner; and this

knowledge of God does not overflow to the senses and does not attach itself to other objects save by accident; faith, simple and naked, is here the virtue which predominates and which forms the base and foundation of this state.

*Philothea.* Oh, that God may be the continual object of my contemplation and my love! May I never interrupt my contemplation any more than I interrupt my breathing, in order that God may be the life of my heart and my spirit; not only by His immensity which fills all the creatures of the universe, not only by His grace which sanctifies all the just, but also by a lively, sweet, and loving presence which can illumine and irradiate me in His eyes. May this *attrait* be the soul of my actions, the force of my words, the aim of my thoughts, the centre of my affections, a discipline in my joys, a support in my sorrows, a salutary remorse in my sins, a mirror in my good works, and finally a union between God and myself which shall never be broken save when death shall have passed into perfect union.

Continue, I beg you, my Father, to instruct me and to speak to me incessantly of a subject which can as little weary those who savour it as a rich man can weary of hearing about the treasure he is beginning to possess, or a lover of her whom he loves, or a happy soul of that which constitutes its happiness.

## DIALOGUE V

*That the humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ is a strength to Contemplation, and how it is to be made use of.*<sup>1</sup>

*Philothea.* All wicked and full of sin as I am, Father, I always feel a gentle love for Our Lord Jesus Christ; and I can call this love my earthly Paradise in such a way that my soul is continuously steeped and soaked in sweetness. I only need to look ceaselessly at Our Lord Jesus Christ and I am in perpetual consolation. When I hear the words of the Gospel, and chiefly those which fell from the lips of my dear Master, it seems to me as if He were here present, or as if He Himself put those words into my heart. Everything I hear said about Jesus Christ unites me gently to Him; and then something happens to me which I do not know if I can explain.

*Director.* Explain it to me as well as you can, Philothea, and I will supply what is lacking in your explanation.

*Philothea.* If I am distracted, Father, and someone speaks to me of Jesus Christ, something takes place within me like what happens to a pot which is on the fire, seething over with bubbles; when someone pours a little cold water on it, all at once the bubbles die away, and that which is within the pot settles quietly down. The

<sup>1</sup> This dialogue is crucial for the understanding of Malaval's doctrine. The main charge brought against him by Bossuet was that of ignoring the humanity of Christ: an accusation to which all mystics of the theocentric type—e.g. the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and even St. John of the Cross—lay themselves open in their more unguarded utterances. Malaval's position, as set forth here, is in line with these great and orthodox teachers; though probably his meaning will only be fully understood by those keenly alive to the metaphysical aspect of religious experience.



name of Jesus, a word of Jesus, an act of Jesus, of which any one talks to me, or of which I think myself, arrests my spirit all at once, calms it, quietens it, recollects it, and raises it from the distraction in which it was, in such a way that one might say it was carried in a moment into some serene and tranquil clime where it no longer hears the noise of the world and no longer sees the crowd of things which before importuned it.

*Director.* But does this calm last long, Philothea?

*Philothea.* It lasts as long as my application; but nature is weak and soon falls back into its ordinary distractions. All the same, it seems to me that afterwards they are not so great nor so turbulent as those from which the soul has just freed itself; just in the same way as the pot which I used as a comparison continues to boil, but not with such agitation or vehemence as before.

*Director.* Now supposing you had a devout thought which was not of Jesus Christ—would it produce the same effect in you?

*Philothea.* It might recollect my spirit to the truth, for I have learnt in the School of Contemplation to recollect myself with all things—with men, with animals, with plants, with everything one sees in the world and with everything one hears, whether good or ill—and that gently, in one moment, in regarding simply that which seems to have as its end the Almighty God who made it or permits it; just as there are certain fruits and certain herbs of which one tastes and eats nothing but the extremities.

But the thought of Jesus Christ does not simply bring about recollection; it leaves the sensible presence of Jesus in the soul, and a very delicate savour of His company.

*Director.* Is this presence an image, a representation of the Person or of the past acts of Our Lord?

*Philothea.* It is not an image, it is a sentiment of Jesus

Christ present. It is as when one walks with a friend whom one does not constantly look at while one walks with him, but of whose company one has evident certitude. This sentiment is most exquisite, but it is difficult to explain; so much so that if God had taken it from me, it would be impossible for me to recall to myself what it was like. But I have this presence, nevertheless, nearly always when I wish it, not by exciting my imagination or my memory to represent anything to myself, for in that case I could explain precisely that which I represent to myself, but a word of Jesus Christ's recalls this sensible presence to me, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, according as it pleases God to give it to me.

As for the taste which accompanies it always, what can I say to you of that? I will make use of the comparison St. Bernard uses in speaking of Jesus Christ. When we have taken a mouthful of honey and have swallowed it all, there still remains to us a sweetness which is not the distinct savour of honey but a certain impression, a certain delicious sensation like the satisfaction one feels after one has eaten. This taste of Jesus Christ is an intimate and subtle sweetness in the depths of the soul which holds it enchanted in the presence of Jesus Christ, and in truth, Father, greater or more vigorous application does not augment it as it would a sweetness received by the senses; for the soul has nothing of this sweetness save that which God pours into it, and it is always communicated in proportion to the presence of Jesus Christ.

*Director.* I bless God for you, Philothea, because of this savour. And if it proceeded from any other principle than from grace, I would bless it, both for the sincere intention with which you receive it and the good use you make of it. But, I beg of you, one more question: When you think of the different states of Jesus Christ, does His

presence not vary according to the state of which you are thinking?

*Philothea.* The presence of Jesus Christ is always the same, even although I am raised by different considerations of His life and of His death. It is His Person, and not His states; it is this Man-God who makes my plenitude and my sweetness, and in all the considerations which may put me in His presence, however different they may be, there is always a sentiment of secret and intimate adoration of His Divinity. For example, that He whom I consider as an infant, or as conversing with me, or as dying, is God Infinite and Incomprehensible in the person of a Man. So much so that, as in contemplating the works of God, the greatest subject of my transport and of my admiration is the God of these works I contemplate, in the same way, when I consider some act or some saying of Jesus Christ, my greatest wonder is Christ Himself, this Man-God who for love of men deigned to do that which I consider. But also, by a reciprocal reflection, consideration of the works of Our Lord raises me to His Person, and this infinite Person leads me to something infinite in the actions of the Saviour I thus consider.

*Director.* Use this grace wisely and attach yourself to nothing but to God, who gives it to you. But, Philothea, does the thought of the humanity of Jesus Christ not in any way hinder the habit of contemplation?

*Philothea.* On the contrary, Christ's most holy humanity helps to raise me up gently to His Divinity, and while I admire a God made man, my admiration carries me at once to that incomprehensible Divinity which is the principle and foundation of my admiration. I think also, Father, that as Jesus Christ came into the world to make us know God, the thought of Jesus Christ brings with it this grace, that it sets us at once in God Pure.



*Director.* That is true, Philothea; it is said in a hundred places in the Gospel that Christ came only to make us love and know His Father, and in the same way that He formerly made use of clay to give sight to the eyes of the blind, so He makes use of the body of His humanity to open the eyes of our souls. And as the clay fell when the eyes of the blind man were opened, so that thought of His humanity vanishes to let us gaze in peace on His Divinity. Thus Jesus Christ causes in us perfect recognition of His Father; for as His Father has drawn us to Himself according to the words of the Gospel, *No man cometh unto the Father but by Me*, so He brings us back to the bosom of the Father by the power which has been given Him and as soon as we have received His humanity in thought, it raises us to His Divinity. The Saviour of the world is a magnet, Philothea; all needles touched by Him turn infallibly towards this pole; I mean to say that all souls touched by His virtue always point towards God.

*Philothea.* How is it, then, Father, that this question is always put forward: Whether those who are in the way of contemplation must always have the holy humanity of Jesus Christ present in their minds? Some writers insist that this thought must never leave them.

*Director.* I have never read any author who said in so many words that it was necessary to abandon the humanity of Jesus Christ; nor, on the other hand, have I read any author who taught that we must keep it ceaselessly before our eyes. Those two propositions go to the two extremes: the one must leave it, the other must never leave it. There is some misunderstanding among writers who advance such extremes, but if they are truly spiritual, they are in accord as regards foundations, for the Holy Spirit who leads them, never contradicts Himself. And, even though in my First

Treatise I instructed you sufficiently on this point, and although you profited by it, I should like, nevertheless, to explain it more fully, and to furnish reasons for what I am about to say, in order that you may instruct others.

It is therefore certain, Philothea, that at whatever elevation we may have arrived, we must never abandon the holy humanity of Jesus Christ; but here is the way in which we ought to preserve His presence. One can retain the humanity of Jesus Christ in three ways. The first way is to consider the mysteries and actions of His life; the second is to represent an image of His Person to ourselves, and hold it fast in our imagination; the third is to think of Him through the understanding, or remind oneself of Him through the memory. All three methods are good, but one may be more profitable than the other, according to the time, the soul in question, and the particular state of each.

There is a time for all Christians to consider the mysteries of Jesus Christ: the Church putting the chief mysteries before them once a year and recapitulating them in the Holy Mass, which is the memorial, the idea, and the crown of the whole life of Christ. Those who give themselves to the life of devotion, do more than the general body of Christians; they remind themselves of those mysteries from time to time, and make them the ordinary subject of their meditations. Above all, those commencing this life propose to themselves the life of Christ as the model of the perfect life; studying His life with care, and considering it, step by step, in order to follow it. But as it is the object of Jesus Christ to lead men to His Father and to pure Divinity, there comes a time when spiritual souls, accustomed to a felt familiarity with the Saviour, pass from the mysteries of His life to the consideration of the Divine Perfections, the Goodness, the Immensity, the

All-powerfulness, and other excellencies of the Divine Nature. And so they leave the mysteries for a time, but in order to do that they do not leave Jesus Christ, because they have within them the habit of faith, and while they think of the mysteries of the Trinity, of the procession of the Word, of the Holy Spirit or the Holiness of God, they cannot have, at the same time, the thought of the humanity; they merely preserve in themselves the habitual memory of it, which it would be impossible for them to lose. It is as if we told a son that he must never abandon his father; we do not mean to oblige him to keep his eyes constantly fixed on him, but to hold him fast in his memory, and to go to him at the time, and in the place that he should go to him. And thus a Christian, while he advances in perfection, does not meditate so often on the mysteries, in which he is already instructed; but he preserves in himself the faith and the love of Christ, being ready to do for Him everything He may inspire in him. He thus acts according to his Master's precepts, even though he does not keep them constantly before his eyes.

There are others who, not content with considering the mysteries, set before their minds an image of Jesus Christ and accustom their imaginations to represent His Person to themselves with a certain aspect or countenance as if they actually saw Him acting and suffering. In some souls such an image becomes so fixed and so familiar that one may say their hearts are a perpetual oratory in which they pray to Jesus Christ at their ease, seeing Him, speaking to Him, and seeming to have Him at their disposition. If such souls are pious and simple, such a representation does them no more harm than they would receive from often gazing at a crucifix or a picture of Jesus Christ.

There are other souls who give a different form to such representations, according to the different mysteries on



which they meditate. They see Jesus Christ as a little child lying in His crib or at His Mother's breast; at other times they see Him covered with a bloody sweat in the garden; again, their imagination binds Him to a pillar, hangs Him on the Cross, causes Him to rise out of the sepulchre radiant with light and majesty; pictures Him thus in many different ways while preserving always the idea of the humanity of Christ. While others who meditate only represent the Mysteries to themselves. When such souls are simple, this facility and this suppleness of the imagination does them no harm, but rather keeps them always in the company of Christ; for, after all, it is not the image they call up which they adore and love, it is Jesus Christ Himself, and their faith is always the source of their merit, even although it is not yet sufficiently purified.

The mysteries have their place; but one cannot always consider them. The imaginary representation of the body of Our Lord can be a cause of harm; and, after all, the body one imagines to oneself is not that of Our Lord; it is an imaginary body which is as different in the imagination of each one as the different imaginations of each one who conjures up the picture. This body does not represent the Soul nor the Divinity of Jesus Christ, and in consequence, Philothea, the noblest and most spiritual way in which to preserve the humanity of Jesus Christ is to regard this humanity by a simple act of faith—loving it and reminding oneself that it is the Tabernacle of the Divine, most sacred and most holy, and the delight of the Eternal Father. When I say the humanity I do not mean that you should separate it from the Divinity; I mean that from time to time you should think of Jesus Christ, God and Man, who is the principle of your salvation and of all the graces you can hope for in this world.

*Philothea.* Even had I not the grace I have just heard you speak of, there are certainly, Father, many bonds which bind me inseparably to Jesus Christ; faith in the Incarnation which I could never lose; thoughts of the mysteries when they present themselves to my mind, living, simple, and lovely, without form or shape and without images; and finally the practice of the Christian virtues and the Sacraments of the Saviour, a double channel of salvation and perfection which no one can ignore. That is why I cannot understand what those contemplatives are who think themselves able to leave the humanity of Jesus Christ, unless it be that there are souls who cannot think as they should of Jesus Christ unless they see Him and touch Him; or others again who imagine that it is necessary always to remember Him actually, as if the habit of faith were not enough.

*Director.* It is certainly deplorable that among Christians there is often more of what one might call images and representations of piety than the spirit of faith which ought to live in them. We always want to love and adore by figures without going to the substance of things, and we stop at the means without going to the end. We must seek Jesus Christ Himself and not merely His mysteries or His images. The humanity has been united to the Divinity by hypostatic union, till there is no longer any but one and the same Person; it is here that this humanity is most precious, most resplendent, and most Divine. God made Himself man in order that man might become God. It is not, therefore, enough to regard the humanity in the Divinity; for since God only abased Himself in order to raise man up to Himself, after we have regarded the Divinity as swallowed up in the humanity, we must look at the humanity raised up to union with the Divinity.

Jesus Christ said, *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. If He is the Way, let us follow Him; if He is the Truth and the Life, let us stay and live in Him. Do not, therefore, form or retain too many images, for Truth is not an image, and whosoever once rests in the Truth will no longer seek shadows or images, however good they may be.

For the same reason, why feed incessantly on this mystery, this miracle, these words of Christ? All these things are the food of the soul, but they are not its life. He who is always eating either has an insatiable hunger which no food satisfies, or else becomes so fat and heavy that he is weighed down by his own flesh.

Let us see, then, that our nourishment converts itself into substance and not into an insatiable voracity or a body weighed down by fat. After we have nourished ourselves and filled ourselves with many words and pious considerations, it is expedient that we should stay by a tranquil act in Life itself, in order that He who wished to enter into us through His words should Himself become the immanent and continual Word which illumines and warms us.

*Philothea*. You touch here on two points which I have often noticed in those who occupy themselves continuously in considering what the Saviour of the world has said and done, but who do not sufficiently love Jesus Christ Himself. Some are always in a state of hunger, without satisfying or contenting either their affections or their thoughts, and they remain empty and sterile of love in the midst of all their good works because they have not Jesus Christ for their fixed and perpetual object. Others, on the other hand, are filled and satisfied with that on which they have meditated. They say marvellous things of God, they make magnificent discourses, sometimes even complete books, and for all that, they have no familiar



intercourse with Jesus Christ, of whom they speak so familiarly; and He who shines forth so strongly in their discourses hardly ever reigns in their hearts. The more that being always dissipated by a multitude of good thoughts, they do not take trouble to recollect themselves in Him who gives them those thoughts, nor to hold their hearts in peace.

*Director.* Listen to what St. John says about that, Philothea. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth* (John i, 4). As if He had wished to say: The Word was made flesh in order that He might dwell among us; but after he had dwelt among us He did not wish that we should always regard Him from the point of view of His flesh. He has shown us His glory, and not only a glory which strikes the senses, which dazzles the imagination, and which penetrates the whole soul with tender sweetness like that of the Transfiguration, but a glory worthy of the Son of God come upon earth; that is to say, a plenitude of grace and truth; whereas in the Old Testament we saw nothing but a plenitude of ceremonies and figures.

*I and My Father are one*, He says, naming Himself first to show His equality; if we know the Father we know Jesus Christ. But, Philothea, who is there who, on considering the Father, would wish to feel or imagine anything in himself; and who is there who, in thinking of the Son, would not at once plunge himself in His pure Divinity?

*It is good to be here*, said St. Peter on Mount Tabor, but Jesus Christ said once when they called Him good, *There is none good but one, that is, God*.

St. Peter made for himself a tabernacle and a state of devotion, and he did not contemplate God, for love of

whom he had been led to Mount Tabor. Also, he spoke in a prophetic spirit as being the head of the Church militant, in which we find more of those souls who, varying from one devotion to another, seek a diversity of tabernacles, than of those who receive the God who wishes to reside and dwell in them as in His own tabernacle. What St. Peter said is good, but what Jesus Christ signified is better. It is good to establish in ourselves a tabernacle of the humanity of Our Lord, with Moses and Elias—that is to say, among the great lights and those of great fervour—but it is still better to understand the Father who says from the cloud, *This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him!* in order that in regarding, through the dimness of faith, the Divinity veiled in humanity, we may hear the word in the silence of contemplation, and may love His well-beloved Son with a humble and prostrate will, and not with a will of sallies and transports.

*Philothea.* The Gospel says also, if I remember right, that St. Peter did not know what he said when he spoke in that way, and it was not the radiance like that of the sun shining out of the face of Jesus Christ which caused the Apostles to fall on their faces, but the voice of the Father speaking from out of the cloud, because the word of God alone has more force to humble our spirits than all our lights and all our reasonings.

*Director.* You are right, Philothea; we take quite a different way in order to know God, from that which God takes to make Himself known; for we attempt to establish in ourselves and by ourselves a spiritual foundation on which to receive God; God, on the contrary, strives to annihilate our spirits in order that He Himself may dwell in us. Moreover, this is what He Himself declares: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die,



it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." If the little seed of our human reason, falling on the ground of faith, which is this ground renewed by the Holy Spirit, does not once die, it remains alone in a very infirm and very imperfect being; but if it dies the mystic death of contemplation it bears much fruit, and faith, through the practice of the Christian life, becomes our reason and our light.

Let us continue our consideration of the manner in which to contemplate Jesus Christ. *If I go not away*, says Our Lord in John xvi, *the Comforter will not come unto you*. What an astonishing, what a terrible prediction! The Apostles have received power to work miracles, and they have wrought them; the Saviour of the world no longer regards them as His servants but as His friends, His brethren, His children, even as His associates in judicial power, having solemnly promised them that they should judge with Him the twelve tribes of Israel. Nevertheless, they did not yet know Jesus Christ because they were not yet sufficiently detached from that which was sensible in the person of Jesus Christ. *Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away*. And St. Augustine, writing on St. John, explains this passage thus: *It is expedient for you that this character of servitor which I bear, should vanish from your eyes. It is true that being the Word, I dwell in the flesh among you, but I do not wish that you should continue to love Me after the flesh and content yourselves with this milk of My sensible presence. You would thus always wish to remain children. It is expedient for you that I go away, because if I did not go, the Holy Spirit would not descend on you. If I do not take from you this tender nourishment on which I have fed you up till now, you will never hunger for the solid food which must feed you. If you attach yourselves to My flesh in a*



*carnal manner you will never be capable of receiving My Spirit.*

And further, Philothea, Our Lord said to His Apostles, gently reproaching them, "So long have I been among you and yet ye have not known Me, because ye have never gone beyond that which ye have seen. *I am He who is*, and not only such as I have appeared to you to be. If ye had penetrated my Being with the eyes of faith which I have opened for you for nearly three years, you would have found my Father in me, and with Him the Holy Spirit which proceeds from me. You must not, therefore, be sad because I go to my Father in order that I may send you the Holy Spirit, for I am never separated from the one or the other, and I only separate Myself from you in order that, losing the image of My flesh, you may know more clearly that I am one with Them."

You see that sadness had filled the hearts of the Apostles because the humanity of Jesus Christ was separated from them; and yet this separation was a necessary disposition to allow the Divinity to come to them. Thus when the flesh is cast down and when all the approaches of the soul are shut to the consideration of sensible things—even although these may be good and holy—then God finds in the soul a temple worthy of Himself. There is then no obstacle to hinder His work, no undue attachment to any other thing to retard it. The Creator fills, according to His pleasure, the whole capacity of His creature, and by His immensity He dilates even more fully the depths of the soul which opens itself wide in love to receive Him and is inflamed by Him at the same moment in which He fills it.

*Philothea.* Alas! how much are those to be pitied who, while never lifting their eyes from Jesus Christ, yet do not realize either His sovereignty or His Spirit. "The

flesh profiteth nothing," said the Saviour; what does profit us is the Spirit which vivifies the flesh and the Divinity which fills it. Do not, therefore, let us leave the humanity of Jesus Christ, but let us consider it as filled by His virtue and His Divinity.

*Director.* Listen once more to the Saviour of the world, Philothea, who, speaking with human lips and earthly words, does not cease to impress on His disciples how excellent, how spiritual, and how divine the work of His Most Holy Spirit in a soul ought to be. *If a man love Me he will keep My words: and My Father will love him and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him.* O God! how truly spiritual is this dwelling in which the Father and the Son love each other reciprocally in man, and in loving each other love man. For what do those words signify, *and My Father will love him*? Is this love simply sanctifying grace? But grace is nothing but participation in Divine Charity, and there is here a cohabitation of the Father and the Son. Are those gifts of the Holy Spirit? But gifts are inferior to sanctifying grace; they are nothing but emanations and channels. There is certainly some greater treasure concealed under those words, which, while it is in all just men, is nevertheless not perceived by them all. It is God the Father who lives in the soul of the just in a very special manner, who begets His Son, and who with Him produces the Holy Spirit in the creature as if in a new being of which Wisdom has said, *My delights are with the sons of men*, because I am produced in them in a new manner and by this production am communicated to them very intimately; so that that which My Father does in eternity in begetting Me, takes place in time in every man who has the good fortune to possess Me.

As, then, there is nothing human in the Trinity, but as

God is more than good, more than holy, and above all things, so nothing human or corporeal must be allowed to enter into the new communication of the Trinity. It is necessary to allow God to be in man proportionately all that He is in Himself, passing thus from the humanity of Jesus Christ to His most pure Divinity. O admirable commerce! in which the humanity of Jesus brings with it His Divinity, and in which His Divinity remains most pure without being obscured by His humanity. It is thus almost possible to say of this operation what is said of the Incarnation: O marvellous mystery which takes place in the soul of the just! Jesus Christ dwells in it, God and Man; God remains that which He is and takes on Himself that which He is not, suffering thereby neither change nor division.

*Philothea.* O sweet and ineffable presence of Jesus! Who would dare to interrupt such an experience by distinct acts of the understanding? Who would stifle that Presence by tumultuous affections of the will, or obscure it by images and figures, seeing that it brings with it the pure act which is God, the substantial image which is Jesus Christ, the perfect love which is the Holy Spirit?

But, Father, what can we reply to St. Teresa and many other Saints, who have unanimously exhorted contemplative souls never to interrupt the memory of the humanity of Jesus Christ in themselves?

*Director.* But that is the very doctrine we follow, properly understood! Jesus Christ, as we have said, is the Way, let us walk in Him; Jesus Christ is the Life, let us live in Him. But remember also, that he who is always going up and down, always moving about, will never arrive at the centre of life. He may cover much ground, but he is always far from home; and making himself attractive labyrinths of so many little devotions



towards the humanity of Jesus Christ, which he alters and varies from time to time, he never finds the true way to set himself at liberty.

Let us go, then, Philothea, from Jesus Christ to Jesus Christ: from the touching of the hem of His garment to the close embrace of Him who is clothed in it, from the humble servitor of the Heavenly Father to His well-beloved Son. If you hold Jesus Christ fast in your heart, it is not necessary to have His name constantly on your lips. *That which God hath joined let not man put asunder.* Let him never consider the humanity separated from the Divinity, but let him rather make use of the humanity in enjoying the Divinity. For the same who said, *He came not to be ministered unto but to minister*, said also, *I and My Father are one.*

Only think seriously and believe firmly that there is no name under heaven save that of Jesus Christ in virtue of which we are able to effect our salvation and acquire our perfection. Jesus Christ, entering one single time into the Sanctuary, has offered Himself for us as a Host agreeable to God; an immaculate Host of infinite propitiation and eternal pacification. He has merited for us every aid which could lead us to eternal life, and He has merited such aid in abundance. Believe that, Philothea, and you have found the secret of the Christian life. Moreover, the more living your faith, the more you will enter into close intimacy with Jesus Christ; not in always returning in thought to the mysteries, not in constantly reoffering your oblations; not in repeated declarations and self-recommendations, but in associating yourself with a true heart with Jesus Christ, living and reigning with Him even in this world, seeing that He said, *The Kingdom of God is within you.*

Tell me, Philothea, if the Saviour of the world did you

the honour of being with you in His visible form in such a way that, never leaving your side, He should be with you in church, in your house, your oratory, in town and country, then, when there was question of praying to Him, would you say, "Lord! I wish to pray in Thy presence and to offer Thy prayers to the Eternal Father"? How uncivil that would be! how useless! how futile! For Jesus Christ accompanies you ceaselessly in order to pray with you, and yet you wish to make a new compact with Him that He should pray! Rather leave Jesus Christ to pray in you, Philothea; and, associating yourself once and for all with Him praying, do not ask yourself by continual reflections, and do not try to tell Him, how you pray; for you will pray far better in conjunction with Him than separated from Him. But you do separate yourself from Him, if during your prayers you make so many reflections on yourself, as if He who is praying in you were not present in you.

If, in the same way, when it was time to eat you said beforehand to Jesus Christ who was conversing privately with you, "Lord! I wish to eat in Your company," would that not be an offence against courtesy and propriety? That is why it should suffice you in all such actions to know that you are with Jesus Christ, and that He wishes to do all things with you.

I dare say to you in truth, Philothea, that Jesus Christ is more present to you and more united with you by grace than by bodily presence; we are reclothed in Him; according to the words of the Apostle, He possesses us, He penetrates us as much by His presence as Creator and Preserver, as by His presence as Redeemer and Sanctifier. This habitual and sometimes actual memory suffices us, then, in all that we do, to do everything with Jesus Christ, for He does not dwell in us solely in order to

give us inspiration and to make us pray, but also in order that He may work all things in us; while we on our part co-operate by faith and love, and while by close attention we consent and gently acquiesce in all that Jesus Christ works in us; not by reiterating many acts of this consent and acquiescence, but by making a continuous and almost uninterrupted act which absorbs, contains, and fills them all sufficiently.

*Philothea.* But someone might say, Father, that the memory of Jesus Christ did not suffice, and that it was necessary also to consider the mysteries of His life and of His passion, as the channels of the many graces He pours forth over us.

*Director.* I wish to consider that point, Philothea, and will do so. But it is not there that I should set contemplation. We prepare it, we entertain it, and we nourish it with this help; considering chiefly three things, when we wish to raise ourselves to God by a mystery of the life of Christ, or by an attribute of the Divinity—that is to say, the necessity, the manner, and the duration. For when the soul is strongly and vigorously united to its God, so that it knows, feels, and experiences God present, then it does not have recourse to other thoughts, but delighting in peace in its God, and in its All, it suspends all other exercises, howsoever holy and perfect they may be. So that if the soul finds itself sometimes too distracted by affairs, it recollects itself by a gentle but sudden act which is nothing else but a recollection of God alone. And if this act has not enough force, particularly to bind the inferior faculties of the soul, the general sense, imagination, and appetite which are the mischief-making, disturbing, and importunate faculties, then the soul uses the consideration of its misery or of its nothingness, or of a mystery or of the first attribute which presents itself, to bring itself



again into the presence of God; to the end that such presence may be continual and without intermission, and not merely limited or confined to the regular hours set apart for prayer.

It makes use also of the mysteries at the celebration of certain festivals, when it reads of these and similar matters, or when it talks of them with others. But here is how it does this, and it is the second of our three considerations. It does this without noise of thought, without particularising or recalling images; it is a swift act of the spirit, as it were an instinct which habit has left and which is a little more than silence, because faith and love dilate this act, which is produced so simply and gently that it passes away without image, without repetition, and without reflection. God, when it pleases Him, operates and adds all the rest; moreover, when the soul has God it seeks nothing more.

Deduce from that what the duration of such an act is; it is a mere moment, it is hardly even a complete movement. And here is a rule which experience proves every day to be true. All things enter into the contemplation of him who contemplates God. I say they enter in; not that one provokes them, or procures them; not that one gently makes them come, but that they present themselves on occasion in such a way that everything a contemplative hears or sees, be it good or bad, natural or supernatural, stirs his spirit without any effort on his part, and enlightens it for the contemplation of the Divine. It is true that the things most closely related to the Divine move it more powerfully than other things. But this takes place without any effort on the part of the self in the same way that the sun attracts to itself the vapours of the earth by a very gentle, very subtle influence, in order to convert them into dew or rain. Thus the grace of contemplation attracts gently to itself all exterior things, in order to

fertilize the soul to a richer abundance. That is why, even although a soul which is as yet little established in contemplation may be sometimes distracted and troubled by the representation of a mystery; yet all the mysteries of religion, all the lights, all the works, and all the temptations would not be able to draw a truly established contemplative from his habitual state.

Nevertheless, a faithful soul takes good care to add nothing to the simple sight of God, unless obliged by some pressing necessity to comfort itself, or by the duties of its profession, which demand some express and distinct consideration. For the rest, everything we add without its being necessary, marks the mistrust of the soul or shows forth its self-love, which, not contenting itself with God, seeks to support itself on the things of God; which, in a poverty which is most rich, demands comfort for its indigence, and finally, not being able to support this heaven-given aridity, seeks to be refreshed and watered. Our God, *Philothea*, is a jealous God. He does not wish us to mingle anything with the knowledge and the love of His Divinity; He aspires to establish a soul in pure contemplation, for all that you consider is below Him whom you adore here present.

*Philothea*. I cannot agree with you, Father. It seems to me that by this privation of every image, you deprive me of the union I wish to preserve with my adorable Mediator. I wish to protest to Him before giving myself to prayer that I have the intention of remaining with Him during that time, and that I wish never to be separated from Him.

*Director*. *Philothea*, the desire you have to remain united with Jesus Christ is already an evident sign of your union with Him. You do not need to make long speeches to Him who penetrates all hearts, but only to take into His

presence the intimate affection of the heart. In fact, when one is accustomed to this simple view, it has the virtue of so greatly simplifying other acts, that one often multiplies them, not truly without recognizing them, but without being able to distinguish exactly between them.

Moreover, is he not sufficiently united with Christ who, through baptism which drowns sin, is enfolded in Him whose death has vanquished our death; who is enrolled through confirmation in Christ's militia, and in both Sacraments bears the ineffaceable character of the Saviour?

He who is reconciled by penance, who is admitted to Christ's Table in the Eucharist and happily changed into Himself—is he not sufficiently united? Indeed, one Communion, well made, would be an all-sufficient preparation for the contemplation of a whole year. What do we say of contemplative priests? Are they not united to Jesus Christ by a sort of paternity which they exercise over Him in producing Him on the altar?

All those things I have just mentioned prepare the soul and raise it of themselves to a close union with Jesus Christ. And here is another admirable thought which brings with it extreme consolation; when man is justified, and when, by virtue of penance, he recovers the grace which he had lost through sin, he is reestablished in the particular graces of all the Sacraments he had formerly received; graces which had been lost to him along with sanctifying grace; and he is renewed in all those first rights which he had lost. This preparation is very ample and very sufficient, for it is founded on the merits of Jesus Christ, nourished by a living faith, and incessantly preserved in the soul by the continual act of contemplation.

St. Paul favours our doctrine in a marvellous way when he exhorts us, Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do,



to do all things in the name of Jesus Christ. For who could imagine that the Apostle would demand of us as many different oblations of Christ as we perform different acts during the day? A lively faith is a perpetual pledge for us in regard to Jesus Christ, and it establishes between us and Him an inviolable alliance, which, by virtue of contemplation, seems to renew and strengthen itself every moment.

Christians, deplorable though it is, do not realize this truth, even although Christians are the Chosen People, the Royal Priesthood, the Holy Nation as St. Peter calls them, and carry in their bosom a treasure of holiness of which they ignore the price; I mean faith in the blood and merits of the Saviour of the world. Christianity, to its shame, suffers thirst in the midst of the fountain which could slake it; and not knowing the spiritual fertility of which this faith would make it capable, it leaves the Source for the rivulets, it leaves the fixed and loving regard of Jesus Christ for those light affections which do nothing but skim the surface of piety. Thus Christians impose on themselves a yoke of innumerable vocal prayers; they load themselves with meditations and oblations to the point of weariness, because, their faith being little exercised, they only believe superficially that Christ is praying in them. They hardly ever look at Him, but always at their own works and their own methods. A strange blindness, Philothea, not to recognize our felicity but to seek incessantly outside ourselves for a foundation which we carry within ourselves.

But if ordinary Christians have not the courage to raise themselves to this purity of faith, would it not be right that the learned, those nourished in the exercise of theology and Holy Scripture, should revive in themselves the use and value of those precious gifts which

some of them bury under the weight of disputes and reasonings, others under the shadows of imagination and of the general sense? Should the learned not feel bound to represent to their own eyes and those of others the riches of Jesus Christ which dwell in the soul without effect, and which most men shut up within themselves as something entirely useless? For even although such learned men may be justified by the good use they make of grace, they lack that art of seeking within themselves in order to be perfect, to be tranquil, to be happy, and to provide themselves and others with abundance.<sup>1</sup>

*Philothea.* Heaven grant that all the Faithful may embrace so good a sentiment, and that those who find themselves established in it may be more and more confirmed in it, without being carried away by the torrent which it is difficult not to follow when one is not fully persuaded of our truths.

Nothing will be begun save through Christ Jesus, and nothing will be consummated save in Him.

<sup>1</sup> The whole of this beautiful passage on the mutual indwelling of Christ and the soul, the heart of Malaval's doctrine, must be read together if its balance is to be preserved. The apparent bias against all but formless prayer at the beginning, if taken alone, is certainly excessive. It is only properly understood in the light of the paragraph dealing with the sacramental life in Christ of the contemplative; to whom, of course, its teaching is specially addressed.

## DIALOGUE VI

- (i) *As to who are the soundest judges of the spiritual state of souls.*
- (ii) *Whether pride is to be feared in contemplation.*
- (iii) *How we are to interpret this saying, that we must put ourselves in the lowest place and wait till God raises us.*
- (iv) *Whether in great temptations it is better to meditate or to contemplate.*
- (v) *Whether in dryness we should return to contemplation.*
- (vi) *Whether when we do not feel the attrait of God we should return to meditation.*
- (vii) *What the drynesses are which oblige the soul to return to meditation.*

*Philothea.* I am going to very be importunate, Father, and very contentious, for I am going to ask you questions which I have been asked, not because I doubt in the very least what you have taught me, but in order to have reasons to give those who are obstinate in their contentions, and also to help the simple and to justify your teaching.

*Director.* If we were to judge the ways of God according to our own opinions we should never rightly know them. We must have knowledge, or experience, or infused light. And those who attempt to deal with the interior life without being armed with one of those three helps, will throw souls into great disorder, into which they will also fall themselves by the secret justice of God, which chastises the temerity of our judgments when we try to submit the spirit of His justice to our reason, and judge the particular *attrait* of souls by our own obscurities and passions. If a man were perfectly versed in all branches of theology with the exception of one treatise which he had not read, it would be impossible for him to give a good account of that treatise, and he would only have his own negligence



to blame. Thus, the greatest theologian, if he is not versed in Mystical Theology, will not be able to explain it pertinently or solidly, and all his lights will only serve to confuse him the more. I even say that when, owing to things which have happened to him, he may have acquired a little experience, it would still be a reproach to him not to be able to collate his experience with his books, seeing that he professes expressly to be a student. While should he be deprived of knowledge and experience all at once, I do not know how he could dare to utter his judgment on such matters.

*Philothea.* Whom, then, would you prefer of all those who can give solid judgment on spiritual things?

*Director.* Those who, besides possessing a knowledge of theology, are enlightened by infused light. This is to be recognized by the fact that they are never at a loss so long as they judge by the help of this light, explaining, even to the smallest details, the operations that are put before them, sometimes even divining them. Such men are to be consulted before all others. After them, the most solid judges are those learned men who have read and digested such matters. The last are the experimentalists; not that in some ways they are not more certain of what they say than the scholars, but that no soul can have experienced all experiences in such a wide field, while a scholar may have read of them all. Moreover, experimentalists without knowledge have difficulty in explaining themselves, if they do not meet with someone learned in such matters to serve as interpreter. When, however, they can explain themselves, it is a notable advantage to those who consult them, it being a double grace of God to experience the Divine action, and to be able to explain it to others.

*Philothea.* Is it not to be feared, Father, that those who

practise the prayer of recollection may fall insensibly into pride, and may imagine they are above their fellows? There are those, it is said, who are attached to their own special opinions, and do not willingly obey rules or Superiors because they want to be themselves their rule and their judge, and because they think themselves more illumined than ordinary Christians.

*Director.* Pride is not the vice of prayer; so good a tree does not bear such evil fruit; but it may be the vice of those who practise prayer with imperfection. Those who pray are human, and even the Sacraments, which are the immediate channels of grace, cannot remove all the weaknesses of the soul. Chastity is a gift of God; yet the Virgins are accused of being proud: but pride does not come from virginity, it comes from corrupt nature, which always tends to evil. I say to you, nevertheless, Philothea, that great pride is not compatible with deep recollection, and that it is almost impossible not to humble oneself greatly when one is in the presence of God by a living faith. The fruits of such proud and false contemplatives would soon give them away; if the worst came to the worst they would need to be punished for their pride, but their recollection would need to be left to them. If a Superior forbade such souls this method of prayer, it would be to mortify and test them, and not in order to keep them long out of the way in which God had put them; the business of the Superior being to edify and not to destroy; to follow God in souls, and not to make them follow him or her. When things are abused good practices must be re-established, but the things themselves must not be lost.

That gardener would indeed be imprudent who would tear out a tree because it had contracted some disease, or because it did not seem to be growing vigorously. Such



a tree must rather be pruned, its roots earthed up and manured; everything must be done for it to the end that it may recover and bear fruit. Even the most holy souls are fields in which there are always bad and useless weeds ready to grow up and choke the flowers; he who would tear out the flowers would either leave a plot of bare ground or one covered with useless weeds.

If, under the pretext that there are abuses, we should suppress everything which is abused, nothing would rest assured in the whole world. Even meditation, which others extol so highly to you, has great dangers. One finds people who make themselves a hundred false images, a hundred ridiculous ideas of God and of our Mysteries, wishing to use representations in order to meditate well. Others pursue erroneous arguments and extravagant considerations in order to force themselves to amplify the three points of meditation. This happens to those who are unlearned—those who, being unable to read, cannot find matter to occupy themselves. It also happens to those who, having read the points, find their minds empty of ideas; for, not wishing to remain empty, and not wishing either to weary themselves, they pass all their time in pious diversions, inventing things which never existed, which they afterwards convert into either dreams or revelations. I do not say, however, that meditation is not a very good and very excellent exercise, nor that many may not remain long in that way, nor that we should draw any to a higher state if we do not see sufficient signs to make them change, and if we have not tested such souls for some time previously. What I have said is to show that there is no kind of devotion which has not its illusions and abuses, but that the illusions and abuses come from man and not from the devotion he practises.

*Philothea.* It is true that we must always separate that



which comes from God from that which the creature mingles with it of his own; we corrupt the best things by the bad use we make of them; but for all that we must not make God an accomplice in our faults, nor dishonour His favours by the sight of the weaknesses with which we sometimes accompany them. I say to you, nevertheless, Father, that certain persons who put forward their own judgments on such subjects often condemn as pride that holy liberty of the soul which allows it to pass over many small actions, and break through the press of creatures in order to join itself directly to its Creator. If one does not obtain all the indulgences attached to the churches of a town; if one does not belong to all the societies and confraternities which spring up from day to day, one is regarded as a singular being who acts contrary to Christian humility. It is a crime to say ingenuously in the presence of such people that one must not stifle oneself with meditations and prayers, but must leave something to the impulse of Divine Love, in order that it may draw us and gain us itself without our always thinking, always willing, always demanding. They imagine when one tries to put excesses right that one wants to abolish good practices, and to retrench the necessary and the superfluous both at once. That is why contemplation is sometimes called a cause of pride, and why those who advise it are considered proud souls who wish to raise themselves above their neighbours.

*Director.* All the practices of the Church are good but they do not suit everybody; we must weigh the quantity and quality of those we adopt. What Our Lord said of the Sabbath is true of every kind of devotion, that man was not made for the Sabbath, but that the Sabbath was made for man. We are not obliged to draw water from every fountain of a city, provided that the fountain

from which we do draw gives sufficient water to quench our thirst. And so with regard to exterior practices, we must use those necessary to our perfection, and not everything which offers itself to us. We should not advance in acting in such a way; we should burden ourselves, overwhelm ourselves, and weary ourselves. And in attempting always to satisfy a passing fervour for something new, we never light in ourselves this Divine Fire which should be inextinguishable in our souls, and which being attached to its centre which is God, by His continual presence, rests in the depth of the heart, peaceful, calm, pure, and radiant: in which it does not in the least resemble a fire which catches hold of paper and sticks, and which after having crackled and sparked and smoked, dies away along with the matter it had lighted; so much so that he who wishes to warm himself must keep on relighting it.

*Philothea.* We must always take the lowest place, we are told, till God raises us, and not try to raise ourselves.

*Director.* If you interpret this advice quite literally to mean that you must always take the lowest place, it would unwittingly lead to disorder. Thus, a superior would not wish to take any place but that of a novice; a priest who thought himself unworthy to celebrate Mass would not do more than recite the Epistle. Every one, *Philothea*, must keep himself in that place in which it has pleased God to put him, being ready, nevertheless, to retire to a lower place should it please God so to ordain it. But we must never change without advice; every one ought to conform in that to the words of the Apostle, to stay in one's vocation. He who is called to meditation does not set himself to vocal prayer when he is given points for meditation; and he who is called to ordinary or infused

contemplation, does not fall back on meditation under pretext of humility. It is his *attrait*, his state; he has seen the signs of it; he has not passed on to this prayer save under advice and with prudence. To go back after that to a lower state of prayer would be tepidity, inconstancy, clearly an infidelity. There are thousands of occasions on which we can humble ourselves and take the lowest place in the practice of virtue: when we are praised, when we are blamed wrongfully, when we are tried; but we must never quit our state or our vocation.

It is necessary that the soul should put itself in the lowest place when it can still doubt whether God is calling it to meditation. It must never change its state on the first awareness of such an invitation; it must prove such an *attrait*, question it, debate it; and while it is finding out what it is meant to do, it must hold itself to meditation. But it must not lightly fall back on meditation, once it has quitted it. One is even obliged, from the time one feels so great an *attrait*, as all the masters of prayer advise, slightly to relax one's manner of meditation; one must content oneself with the simple consideration of the mystery and some gentle and tranquil affective prayer, to judge in what state the soul really is, and to leave room for the *attrait* of God, in case His goodness wishes to raise it to a more perfect prayer. We are as dust before God; dust lies on the ground, but when the wind blows the dust follows the movement of the wind which raises it. That is a comparison of St. Teresa's, in one of her letters, from which we gather that our interior disposition should always be annihilation of self, but that true selflessness is never contrary to Divine inspiration or to good sense. False humility is as insulting to God as real pride.

When the Angel came to announce to the Blessed Virgin that she was to be the Mother of God, she thought



herself unworthy of this Divine Grace, through a humility more profound than all the depths of humility to which men or angels can ever reduce themselves in the presence of the Divine Majesty. But in spite of that she did not draw back; she fulfilled her maternity in surmounting her humility. We shall never lose anything by obeying, and if God wishes to humble us in order to save the soul from that pride to which His favours may raise it, He will know how to do it in His own good time. The loftiest states carry the greatest humiliations, and the humility that strikes the eyes of the world is neither so well established nor so solid as that in which God teaches the soul from within.

But if you will believe it, Philothea, it is not always from humility that we refuse the favours of Heaven; it is sometimes from pride, not wishing to give up our own way. It is also very often from cowardice and pusillanimity, as in the case of contemplation. One does not fear this kind of prayer because it is sublime, but because it is mortifying. True contemplation is the death of the senses; a soul which desires to enjoy God is careful to dispense with all superfluity of images, and all occupations which might draw it away from its object, and it does not allow the senses to act till duty and the call of its profession demand that they should do so. Ordinary contemplation, and even more infused contemplation, is a voluntary death of all action, of every affection, all reasoning and memory, everything which is not God and does not lead to God. That is hard for human nature, Philothea, which always wants to be doing something; it is hard for the mind, which always wants to be reasoning; it is hard for vanity, which always wants to shine, even in devotion itself, by preparations, bearing, and speech.

In the Gospel, all the invited guests excused themselves

from the king's banquet, not from humility, but because each one wished to follow his own spirit and carry out his own will and not that of the Master, under the pretext that the things which occupied him were not bad things.

Be very humble, Philothea, but do not convert your humility into the prudence of the world under pretext of good, for then you will not be sincerely humble, you will rather be subtly and insidiously self-willed.

*Philothea.* I see clearly that true humility is no less a gift from Heaven than the other Christian virtues, and that the world often shrinks from it only to flee it.

Is it not better at all times in great temptations, to meditate, rather than to hold to contemplation a soul that is utterly empty, and for that reason more openly exposed to the attack of evil?

*Director.* When those who are in the way of meditation fall into temptations during prayer, they do not cease to meditate, and they drive away the temptation, either by some ejaculatory prayer, or by the very material of their prayer, which supports them in occupying them. But if the temptation continues in spite of all they can do, then they let the temptation go on, but keep the will firm in following their way; for otherwise the will would be the sport of the Evil One, and sometimes even of nature itself, diverting itself in driving away the temptation without prosecuting its prayer. I say the same as regards contemplation; those who are tempted must bring themselves back the more if possible into the presence of God, and even make use of some gentle aspirations according to the force of the temptation. But if after some effort the temptation does not give way, then it must be left, and the soul must hold itself in the presence of God without quitting its way. The grace of God suffices us, and strength is made perfect

in weakness. We must not say that the soul is empty, seeing that it keeps within it God Present; and there are kinds of temptation which the soul, even when full of the most devout considerations and burning with the purest flames of devotion, cannot drive away. No one can drive them away save He who commanded the waves; who, coming and casting a glance on the sea, caused the tempest to cease, and tranquillity to reign over everything. He taxed the Apostles with their excessive fear, and He would have preferred their fervent faith in the midst of the tempest, to their invocations and clamourings, because even though He had gone to sleep in the boat, He had not ceased to be present in their hearts.

*Philothea.* The soul which keeps silence in the midst of temptation, adores, while not uttering one word, the justice of God which permits the temptation; it awaits His mercy, it exercises patience, and finally it quietly pursues its course, withdrawing from the clutches of the temptation. But what do you say of those souls who suffer such great dryness that they cannot even realize God Present? Should they not then return humbly to meditation?

*Director.* There are great drynesses even in the way of meditation; the bread of prayer is often without taste; the most beautiful thoughts often leave nothing affective in the soul, and sometimes the drynesses pass into powerlessness to meditate. But the soul, in spite of the dryness which has come to it, does not leave its meditation; it strains itself, it goes over and over its material for meditation, and when it can no longer do anything it resolves to suffer without inquietude, this Cross being of greater merit than affections or thoughts. Neither does the contemplative soul abandon its contemplation on account of dryness; its nothingness suffices it in the presence of God, and dryness is, after all, in greater conformity with its



state of abnegation than consolations and sweetnesses. The faith which upholds it is verily a dry ground, but it is a solid ground on which one can build firmer foundations than on ground wet with rain or dew, in which one's feet sometimes sink down and bring back nothing but mud. Dryness deprives one of thought, but it does not deprive one of the presence of God, even although it can deprive one of the feeling of this presence. Faith is never really lost even in the greatest tribulations, and, in consequence, the presence of God which nourishes it, endures for ever. If nature becomes weary it is an imperfection natural to it and it is right and proper that grace should allow it to become wearied. "Ah! nature!" said a soul, "thou wilt not remain one hour in prayer, and I would thou couldst remain two!" When the contemplative soul continues to battle with the senses it suffers wearisome dryness till it has thoroughly stripped itself; but when the senses are once thoroughly mortified, the dryness will be wholly spiritual. The soul will no longer have anything, and it will not desire anything, but the good pleasure of God.

Those who begin to enter on this blessed path will feel such wonderful sweetness and so great a quietude that one would say all their passions were stilled, and that they could do all things, suffer all things. But after a time, God weans them; nothing is left to them but faith and God. Is it necessary for that reason that they should draw back, and that they should seek meditation because sensible sweetness is lacking to them? sweetness which had only been given to help them to pass from one state to another?

*Philothea.* How, then, is one to interpret the holy Doctors who have often been quoted to me? They say that when a soul does not feel the *attrait* of God which

formerly filled it with joy, it must turn back and take up meditation.

*Director.* Listen to this important explanation, Philothea, which will do justice to the holy Doctors and give rest to those souls who are troubled every day because such matters are not wisely explained to them. God sometimes gives souls who are in the way of meditation, lights and transports and rich communications of His love which lead them onwards towards perfection. St. Bernard in the third Sermon on the Circumcision remarks that as yet few arrive at that sublime state of perfection in which the soul does all things without effort, and in which it suffers the greatest crosses with tranquillity. That Our Lord, nevertheless, sometimes has the goodness to win the weak by signal and sovereign delights, but that they must not mistake such delights for the possession of grace itself.

Such persons should consider, he says, that the favour they receive is rather lent than given to them; also, that such souls, Philothea, have not changed their state, and that when the Divine infused grace which satisfied them comes to be lacking, then they must return to meditation, to penitence, and to their other exercises; such graces being merely passing, and not being given save to fortify them, and certainly not to draw them out of their true way.

The same is true of those who are in the way of ordinary contemplation; if they receive transports, ecstasies, the prayer of quiet, and other gifts of God, which are merely passing, they must abandon themselves to God while they have those gifts in order not to hinder His operation in them. But they must return to their ordinary contemplation when they no longer have those extraordinary gifts, and not to meditation; for God has not given them those extraordinary graces in order to let them fall back; He has cheered them, consoled them, fortified them to pursue

their course with more love and more fidelity than before.

In a word, Philothea, those great men, illumined by doctrine and experience, who knew that the loving contemplation of God was a fixed state for certain souls, did not expect that when such souls no longer had extraordinary gifts they should quit their way, but rather that they should return to their way, and not now contemplate, now meditate, which would be an irregularity. For I presuppose, as I have said, that such a soul has received all the signs of its state.

*Philothea.* I have certainly seen souls misled by the passage which says that when the soul no longer feels anything, it follows of necessity that it should meditate. But is there no dryness so great that a soul might be obliged in order to escape from it, to return to meditation?

*Director.* Those who would wish to raise themselves by their own efforts to contemplation, without any of the usual signs, without vocation and without advice; who flatter themselves, who seek idleness, who leave meditation from imitativeness and complaisance; such souls must never be content merely to suffer dryness, and if they insist on merely suffering it, then their dryness will turn now into inquietude, now into illusions, which will soon make them aware that they have entered into the Chamber of the Bridegroom without having been called. For those who are truly called, their drynesses are never without support and without a deep-lying foundation of repose which must suffice them in this way.

It is true that even these last may have fallen into imperfections and negligences which may notably have turned them aside. Sometimes even something which demanded much attention and discussion may have filled them with distractions, especially if they are not yet well



purged of their over-eagerness and solitudes. In such cases it is expedient that the soul should recollect itself by some reading or meditation; but when it is re-established in its former calm, then it must set itself to its former way of prayer; but even in this necessity, its meditation must not be made by reasoning or by words, but, if it is possible, by considerations and affections, in order to move the soul as little as possible from its true state.

## DIALOGUE VII

- (i) *What degree of mortification is requisite to contemplation.*
- (ii) *Whether a soul must have long practised meditation before advancing to contemplation.*
- (iii) *Whether every soul is called to contemplation.*

*Philothea.* Are only those souls which are perfectly mortified, called to contemplation?

*Director.* God being the Master of the order of things, He changes the order when it pleases Him in His productions and His works. As a rule, the more mortified souls receive more of His graces than others; but God does not always abide by the degree of mortification, and He sometimes forestalls souls with His gifts, wishing to win them by delights and attractions before making them die to self.

The Magdalene and the Samaritan were both great sinners; but, nevertheless, God raised them in a moment to a great love, and they at once enjoyed an ineffable peace which would have cost others much labour to win. But God understands how to have his recompense afterwards, and justice never loses anything, even although mercy may have run on before her. This is clearly shown in our day in St. Catherine of Genoa, who was caught up suddenly into the very heart of God, but who, in the course of time, descended to His Tribunal, where she was treated as a criminal, even although at the beginning she had been treated as a lover. Thus God sometimes changes the order, setting those first who have come last, and giving converted sinners the advantages and privileges of good souls far advanced.

But besides this reason, which comes from the liberty

of God in the distribution of graces, it is necessary to make a distinction between ordinary and infused contemplation. The soul must be much more dead to all things to obtain the latter, than to have some part in the former; because infused contemplation is an enjoyment of God, and a communication of His caresses, in which the soul does nothing but follow the impetuosity of the Divine Spirit. But ordinary contemplation is also the work of the Spirit, and is merely the beginning of favours. That is why a soul is often called to ordinary contemplation after having passed through sufficient mortification, and after having quitted affection for sin; contemplation itself achieving that death of the senses and the spirit which other exercises of devotion (or the infidelity of the soul, which was not yet spurred by this attraction) may have only slightly advanced. For laborious contemplation is the epitome of all mortifications, seeing that it brooks nothing sensible, and that it draws the soul away from all earthly, and even heavenly things, so far as they are accompanied by any over-human taste or feeling. That was why it was said by Harphius and other mystics that contemplation consumed man little by little, and that it was even necessary to use some discretion in its application, to let the martyrdom go forward with gentleness. The most austere penances do not mortify a soul so greatly as a continual application of the spirit to God, even although such application is gentle and without effort.

We must not, therefore, discourage those persons who, not seeming to be dead to the world, have nevertheless an *attrait* towards contemplation; we must exhort them to be faithful, so that they may achieve contemplation rather than die in the attempt. We preserve all the vigour of the senses in meditation and in exterior works, and it is necessary that we should preserve it in order to act and



to suffer; but when there comes a time to refuse the senses many little diversions which before amused them, and many little satisfactions which nourished them, then dryness becomes greater, the soul is more naked and more solitary, and the approaches of God drive away all sensible things from it with greater force, though perhaps with less feeling.

One can compare this suspension with the natural heat of our bodies, which is used up insensibly by the same things which contribute to make it, even though we are not conscious of its diminishing or dwindling away.

*Philothea.* It is surely this, Father, which deceives many directors, who, seeing souls advance in an ordinary enough way, not apparently having followed the way of penitence and mortification which is the mark of notable advancement, cannot imagine that such souls can go much farther than many others who are more mortified and more penitent. Nevertheless, those austere souls are not yet called by any sign they are aware of, and it is the pure mercy of God which here makes all the difference, and not a certain degree of penitence or mortification.

*Director.* That is so true that one knows from experience how those who are most rigid and austere in the use of physical mortifications oppose themselves obstinately to the way of contemplation, thinking it a way of idleness, and that, under pretext of interior prayer, contemplative souls flee effort or mortification. But in truth, persons truly called to this prayer do not flee mortification; they seek it by another road and, as if they wished to recommence the course of their penitence, they shut the door of the senses to all sweetness, they detach their appetites from the love of created things, and sometimes leaving the subjection of the body to the last, know well that once the spirit is conquered and humbled by this abstraction

from sensible things, the body is much more easily subjected to all the penances one wishes to impose upon it. It is even very useful, when a soul begins to give itself to contemplation, to override physical penances in order to purify the self-love one has for those penances; then later on to resume them with the moderation suitable to the strength and the vocation of each one. For one sees people numb and destroy their bodies with a pitiless severity, their spirit, which is not yet destroyed, being then only worthy of compassion.

It is certainly easier to mortify the body through the spirit than the spirit through the body. Contemplation brings in its train so admirable a mortification of the senses by the abstraction from all sensible things to which it reduces the soul, that penance becomes gentle compared with the terror it was before, the body, which is subdued by the suspension of the spirit, no longer having any of the fire and vivacity which formerly made it sensitive and tender towards austerities.

Moreover, the high esteem of God which the soul conceives in dark contemplation, would lead it to an excess of penance were it not restrained. But the directors of such souls must consider wisely that spirit and body must not be consumed at the same time, nor the strength be exhausted by suffering, seeing that it diminishes daily through application.

There are also in this state purgations and interior sufferings which take the place of the discipline and the hair-shirt. Add to that, that we have come to a different age; that the externals of penance have been so corrupted by the abuses to which they have been subjected, that it is no wonder some souls only practise penance in the sight of God through tribulation and suffering of spirit; nor that they receive more grace than many others who

make their perfection consist in physical penance; every one not being called to the same state, and the sanctification of each being to do the will of God.

It is therefore true, Philothea, that the more our self-love and our passions are mortified, the more we shall advance in the way of contemplation if we are called to that way; but should we meet with initial graces which do not arise from extraordinary mortification, it is God achieving with efficacy on His part that which He began with some concession to our weakness.

*Philothea.* I have no longer so much difficulty in realizing that it is really interior mortification which humbles the soul. We can often mortify ourselves without looking at God, but it is almost impossible to have God always present without mortifying ourselves much; the presence of God being incompatible with sin, and that which destroys sin destroying also that self-love which is the enemy of mortification.

*Director.* Co-operate on your part, Philothea, with this mortification, and never tell me that you die for love of God, if love of self is not dying within you. The food of prayer is mortification, and the soul of mortification is prayer. Prayer without mortification is merely an occupation of the spirit, which will soon become vanity of spirit; while austerity without much prayer is a burden to the body, which produces habit, wretchedness, vanity, but very seldom love. But as for the mortification of the spirit, it may by itself pass for prayer when it is voluntary and when it is accompanied by love. So much so, Philothea, that if you had to fall back in one of those two things—which God does not wish—I should rather see you lose two degrees of prayer than one degree of this true mortification of spirit.

On which you will remark that there is a great difference



between the use we ought to make of mortification of the body and that which we ought to make of mortification of the spirit, in the ways of God. When the soul begins to retire altogether from the world and to renounce sin, the body must be subdued in order that it may become supple to the spirit, and leave the spirit free to obey God. The weapons which sin finds in the flesh must be blunted; fervour must be stirred up by fasting and discipline because the interior fire is not yet lighted. But so soon as the soul catches fire and advances in love, it is necessary to modify the mortifications of the body, which is sufficiently exercised by the spirit. For as the body at first gave the spirit much with which to inflame itself, the spirit now gives its own fire and consumes the body by its fervour; the brain becomes weary, the heart grows weak, the breath becomes laboured, and the body becomes heavy and unfitted for the functions of the soul. And so, according to the advice of St. Ignatius in his *Exercises*, we must use penance in the purgative life, moderate it in the illuminative life, and moderate it still more in the unitive life.

For while drynesses exhaust the soul, consolations devour it no less, even when both are experienced in a moderate degree, without speaking of extraordinary and Divine effusions which the body can hardly support. Moreover, when one is united to Christ crucified, does one ever lack the Cross within or without, that Cross which brings the body to reason? It serves no end to plead the horrible penances of the Saints: these are extraordinary ways. They sometimes practised penances to confound the cowardice of sinners, sometimes to abate the fervour of the spirit and balance their transports; and God gave them miraculous strength to support that to which ordinary men dare not aspire.

But as for the mortification of the spirit and the regulating of its passions, which are the domestic counsellors of sin, one must harry them to the death and pardon them nothing, no matter to what degree of perfection the soul may have arrived.

This mortification of the spirit is so necessary that even those who are in the way of meditation no longer meditate with profit, if in meditating they do not mortify their passions, and it is an error to think that victory over the passions is only to be expected of the contemplative. Listen to the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, who, after having quoted some words of the Saviour's, adds: *Those are the words of Jesus Christ, by which we are advised to imitate His life and His ways if we wish to be truly illumined and delivered from all blindness of heart.*

The imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ produces true lights and chases away blindness of heart: so that there are none save those who imitate Him, who are worthy to meditate on His works and His mysteries, to the end that His words may not fall into hearts which would allow them to be stifled. Imitation is the fruit of meditation, and meditation is the support of imitation. It is for want of this mortification of the spirit, which is true imitation of Our Saviour, that nearly all meditations which are otherwise good and holy remain fruitless. The light of our redoubtable mysteries shines into dark and occupied souls who pride themselves on one consideration and one discourse; their darkness does not at all comprehend this light; because they think it is only necessary to talk, they do not remember it is necessary to die.

This mortification is, therefore, not only necessary in order to contemplate well but also to meditate well, to communicate well, to preach well, and worthily to fulfil the great works of God, who wills to be adored in spirit

and in truth, and whose will it is that meditation should unite us more perfectly with Him. All the same, as I have said, mortification in general has its degrees, and it is for expert directors to judge them.

*Philothea.* Is it necessary to have practised meditation for long, before being ready for Contemplation?

*Director.* Meditation can be considered in two ways; either as an instruction of the soul in the mysteries of the Faith and the Christian virtues, or as an affective meditation which furnishes the heart with material to set it on fire with the love of God. It is not so much instructive meditation which disposes to this prayer as inflamed meditation; because the first multiplies reasonings and figures, while the second, contenting itself with little matter, inflames itself at first by lively and eager affection and seems to go more directly to God than the first, approaching Him by the simple act of contemplation which inflames the will by simple faith in God Present.

There is, therefore, no precise time at which one ought to abandon meditation; but it is certain that those who give themselves to God by affective meditation are more disposed to contemplation than others. St. Bonaventura desired that some should meditate four months, some five, and some six, because amongst those who meditate one sees some who make most progress in least time, and others who gain little profit in a long course of years. Scholars who have already penetrated the Christian truths many times ought, as much as they feel themselves disposed, to throw themselves into the very heart of the naked, simple, universal faith, envisaging God Present in themselves after having so often searched for Him in creatures, and so often examined that which He is and that which He is not. The simple, who have never been capable of meditating, whether because they could not read, or because they



had not a certain disposition of spirit necessary to those who would reason and discuss, and who, nevertheless, have hearts easily inflamed for God, must sigh for this loving rest of contemplation and hold themselves gently in the presence of God, who is the end and the prize of all which the others do.

As for those who have long practised meditation, they must gradually change their meditations into affections; and practising little pauses during their prayer, must accustom themselves to the loving presence of God. It is a maxim of spiritual people that a good meditation ends in contemplation, for it would be an extravagance to think that it is not praiseworthy and sometimes necessary to hold oneself for a few minutes before God in adoration and in silence, whether to hear His inspirations or to taste Him more fully present by the repose of the spirit, which is an essay towards that union towards which all our prayers and all our works must tend.

*Philothea.* It seems to me from what you say, that you would like to put the whole world into the way of contemplation. But there are many people who are not capable of holding themselves long in the presence of God. And moreover it appears to me that no one should aspire through his industry to a state which is beyond his own powers.

*Director.* Ah, Philothea, who will give me a tongue of fire to pierce the hearts of those who set themselves against the truth, the simplicity, and the wholly pacific sweetness of this state? To forbid Christians who are capable of it, who know it and need nothing but to be affirmed in it, to spend an hour of prayer in the simple presence of God! to maintain that they are wasting time in regarding God Present—is that not to do an injury to God and man? Such people, in order not to give up their own reasoning

and meditation, block with stones and thorns a path which leads, in so holy a way, to the possession of God; and which, sacrificing to Him all the powers of the soul, which always want to be active and stirring about, makes us recognize better than we could in any other way that God, being pure spirit, must be adored in spirit, because this *attrait* concentrates all our reasonings in faith, and all our affections in love. Nevertheless, with what contempt are not those treated who speak and write of contemplation! By which those who treat them thus, persisting wilfully in their own way, show clearly that, possessing no charity, they have not been able to profit by the meditation on which they so greatly pride themselves, and that they are not sufficiently mortified to practise either one or other of these methods of prayer.

They wish to make incessant considerations in their prayers, and they set on one side all the Christian consideration they should have for devout souls, and for those good people who go to God more simply than they do themselves. They want to draw pious affections from their subjects, and instead they fill themselves with bitterness and indignation against innocent souls. They are always making demands of God, and they abuse those who demand nothing but God. They make long speeches to Jesus Christ, but they never listen to hear Jesus Christ speak; He who says nothing more frequently to the heart than those two words, *Peace* and *Love*. Meditations are good, but those who meditate in this spirit are not good; seeing that they make use of so many artifices to turn souls from a truth solemnly received, namely that the continuous and loving presence of God, in simple faith of that which He is, is a very holy and a very perfect prayer.

It is in prayer, Philothea, as in certain states to which

many are called, but few so dispose themselves as to attain. All the faithful are called to Christian perfection without distinction of sex or condition, and yet the greatest number are those who do not tend at all towards perfection. Most men love evil better than good: most of those who love good perform it imperfectly. And one sees an infinite number who cannot comprehend that a venial sin committed with determination is so insupportable in the sight of God that He would rather see the annihilation of all creatures and of both angelic and human nature, did His goodness not restrain Him. All ecclesiastics are called to ecclesiastical perfection, and all religious to religious perfection. Yet how many ecclesiastics and religious there are who content themselves with being in the state of perfection, and never trouble about the perfection belonging to their state! Our good God makes vocations, while men wish to make their own choice; He orders everything aright and we disorder all that He has ordered. He wants to sanctify us all, and each one rejects the way of his own sanctification.

I say the same of ordinary contemplation in the light of faith; many are called to it but few are chosen. Leaving the wicked aside, good people who are learned are often obstinate in their judgments; they do not want to read the books which treat of contemplation, or they read them with preoccupation; they interest themselves warmly in their own particular methods, and sometimes vanity even makes them think that simple souls who ask their advice will never be able to attain to a certain state, never realizing that they have not attained to it themselves. Any abuse which may occur makes them angry and suspicious of many souls who have abused nothing; a difficulty set before them embarrasses them, and they complain of the time they are made to lose, instead of humbly and



sincerely sending such souls to those who have travelled by the same path, and can therefore understand them better than they do. So much so that we can add to the number of those who are not disposed to contemplation, and are unfaithful to the inspirations of God, those whom directors turn from it every day, in order to act according to their own particular views.

We must, therefore, use discernment, Philothea, and distinguish a little between souls in order that they may not deceive themselves and that those who direct them may not deceive themselves either, whether in turning souls from the right road, or in urging them forward out of reason.

*Philothea.* What a difficult thing the direction of souls must always be! One often sees that when those under direction would like to follow the *attrait* of God, those who direct them prevent them from obeying, and when those who direct are disposed to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in the government of souls, it often happens that souls withstand their directors, or do not leave themselves supple in their hands. But it seems to me that in such matters the directors are more often to blame than the souls they direct; they should have more knowledge and more experience of the ways of God; they should no longer directly oppose the Holy Spirit, who has seen fit to communicate His graces and lights, for the universal good of the faithful, to all those who are established by the authority of their legitimate superiors in the service of the Church. In any case it is good to abandon oneself utterly to God; and I think that when the intentions of those who direct themselves are pure, they will not find place for deception, or at least they will not be deceived for long.

*Director.* It is true, Philothea, that God sometimes directs souls immediately of Himself, and that, making

Himself powerful in them by signs and illuminations, He makes Himself obeyed by those He directs. But such miracles do not happen every day, and many souls remain imperfect because they have not taken care to seek the best advice, or to ask it of God with true detachment.

Never admit to contemplation, Philothea, those whose wills are utterly opposed to this state; and pray God that He may free them of their passions, and that He will make them taste that which they have made a point of fighting against. For it is in contemplation particularly that God asks for men of peace and good will.

Neither admit to this region of tranquillity certain temperaments which are full of fire, to whom a moderate application of the presence of God would certainly do no harm, but who would not be capable of moderating their application. Such natures are too impetuous and too restless, and if exterior works and penance have not first calmed them down, they will burn themselves up in this path without ever advancing.

Neither do I wish for contemplation certain temperaments who are the opposite of the first—I mean souls of heavy, lethargic nature, who fall asleep in the midst of their vigils, and in whom the spirit seems to be buried in the flesh and not to have liberty for its operations. Continual application would make such people even more dangerously lethargic; they would run a risk of contracting a weakness of body and spirit which would make them fit for nothing.

Invalids, and those suffering from some special infirmity which is not compatible with a moderate attention, must not give themselves to contemplation. When the saints were ill it seems almost as if their powers of body were changed into powers of soul, and that these men of prayer were sustained by the special help of God. Besides that,



there is a great difference between ordinary and infused contemplation; for in the latter, to use the words of St. Bernard, God, All-Calm and All-Tranquil, reposes in the soul, and this takes place without much effort and without much application, while in ordinary contemplation it is the soul which must repose in God by its own effort and application.<sup>1</sup>

Nor would you wish to make those contemplate, Philothea, who live in sin or who so frequently fall into evil-doing that one cannot think they have yet taken serious thought for their salvation, far less that they can aspire to this degree of perfection.

Neither would you admit to this exercise men so coarse and animal that they have difficulty in rising above their general sense; such souls hardly have the power of reasoning, and if they believe in the Mysteries of Christianity it is merely with the feeble and imperfect consent of their wills, consent which has been drawn from them by dint of repeated instruction, which one is obliged to refresh from time to time lest they should forget the principles of their salvation. Such poor souls resemble those invalids who only live by artifice, whose weakness must from time to time be relieved; they are not capable of contemplation, being totally sunk in the senses and in material things.

Those of feeble spirit are even less fitted to the prayer of recollection than the ignorant; I mean feeble with a natural feebleness, for such souls are not lethargic and material in the same way as those I spoke of before. They are better informed and have higher powers, but they are not capable of giving firm and continuous attention to the things of the spirit; their reasoning powers are confused,

<sup>1</sup> This distinction is enough in itself to acquit Malaval of the charge of Quietism; for the Quietist attributes the characteristics of infused contemplation to all contemplative prayer, and denies the need of "effort and application."



and their judgment unstable. This comes from the instability of their brain, and can neither be corrected by precept nor strengthened by exercise. Such people would be astonished, stunned, and overwhelmed if one asked them to hold themselves in the presence of God, and if from a hasty curiosity they wished to put themselves in this prayer just in order to do as others do, they would gain nothing from it but languors and extravagances and all kinds of problems with which they would importune their Confessors.

All those I have just spoken to you about, Philothea, without including wilful sinners, are not at all fitted for contemplation, either because of their natural defects, or because of their inveterate defects of body and spirit; which defects cannot be overcome save by a miracle, and such miracles seldom take place, because God does not do violence to nature, and because His grace, which overcomes passion and sins, does not change dispositions and spirits save very rarely.

*Philothea.* We must admit, Father, that a good disposition of spirit and body is a great favour from Heaven. I willingly repeat here what you have impressed on me so many times—Grace supposes nature, it does not give it; just as faith supposes reason, but does not create it. Grace achieves something from imperfection, but it does not create that which is not in nature.

*Director.* The Wise Man testified in Holy Scripture, Philothea, that God had given him good sense and a fine nature. Many of the Fathers were shining lights in the world and in the midst of Paganism itself, before they became great spirits in the Church; and we see every day that the best natures are more susceptible to Christian discipline and virtues than natures which are cross-grained and diametrically opposed to the others. The Author of

grace is also the Author of nature, and when all things remain in the order in which He has made them, they are more capable of serving His designs. Give thanks to Him, therefore, for all the mercies He has showered on you in the order of nature as of grace. The more spirit and good sense you have, the more blameworthy you will be if you do not employ them to your salvation, and to the glory of Him who has given them to you for those two unique ends. Happy are they who use them well.

But what can we say of those souls called to recollection who put so many impediments in its way that they never achieve it? For, Philothea, one must count among them those who by their fault or their lukewarmness—even although otherwise good and just—never make a single step forward in Christianity if they are of the world, nor in ecclesiastical perfection if they are of the priesthood, nor in religious perfection if they are religious. The reason is that nonchalant souls are always apprehensive, not only in matters beyond their comprehension, but also in matters beyond their ordinary manner of living. They think that impossible which they have never done, and a horrible negligence is rather their rule than their weakness.

So that, Philothea, if we subtract from the number of those whom God would call to contemplation, the sick, the indolent, and the unfaithful, we must not be surprised that there are so few who enter on this way. The multitude of those who never embrace this prayer is not an argument for its difficulty, but a proof of the wretchedness and the ingratitude of man. For both of these evils sometimes prevent the recognition of the true signs of a vocation to recollection in the righteous, who are afraid to be too righteous: even though I do not deny that the Divine Wisdom may wish to keep certain devout souls all their

lives in the way of meditation, yet this must not be taken as a rule.

It sometimes happens also that God hides contemplation under the cloak, so to speak, of meditation; this happens when the soul receives all that it reads, and all that it meditates about with so great an avidity, and so ardent a thirst, that that which remains to it does not seem so much even as a drop of water, compared to its ardours. That is a sign that the deep spring it possesses comes from another source than exterior words, and that it possesses a treasure which cannot much be added to from the few grains of gold meditation brings it, the meditation being rather a tribute which the soul pays to humility or to love, than a recognized need to meditate. Moreover, such souls never oppose themselves to contemplation; neither are they attached to meditation; they obey simply the *attrait* of God. That is how we ought to interpret what Cassian observes in his *Collations* in connection with a solitary who found all his spiritual life in those words: *Deus in adiutorium meum intende. Domine ad adjuvandum me festina.* And also that which is said of Gregory Lopez, the famous solitary of New Spain, in his *Life*, that he spent several years with those words, *Pater fiat voluntas tua sicut in coelo et in terra. Amen, Jesu.* And what St. Teresa says in the *Way of Perfection* of a woman, who in reciting the Lord's Prayer was raised to highest union with God. It is thus that God sometimes disguises those souls, whose directors might refuse to release them from considerations and ordinary prayer; teaching them thus to study His ways and not to discipline them indiscreetly.



## DIALOGUE VIII

- (i) *Whether one can seek contemplation.*
- (ii) *Whether one ought to recommend a method for the practice of contemplation.*
- (iii) *Whether the clearness with which one strives to explain contemplation takes away from the dignity of that state.*

*Philothea.* It is easy to gather from what you have just said that those who have no natural hindrances which prevent them from practising contemplation may seek it and even ask it of God.

*Director.* No one may enter the way of perfection before his time or without having perceived the signs in himself which we spoke of in our first talk on this matter. But a soul may seek contemplation, and ask it of God without over-eagerness, and dispose itself for it as well as it can. I mean, *Philothea*, that a soul may seek contemplation, this prayer of faith which is a loving calm of the soul, and a closer union with God; but it may not ask for raptures or ecstasies or extraordinary gifts which might arouse its pride. For we may ask for great faith, and for great love, and in consequence, we may ask for ordinary or infused contemplation, which are, both of them, nothing but the continual and permanent exercise of a more perfect faith and a more perfect love.

*Walk before Me*, God said to Abraham, *and be thou perfect*. Contemplation is a means of walking continually in the presence of God, of mortifying the senses, and of uniting the soul more closely to the Divine Majesty. We may, therefore, seek it in order to arrive at greater perfection, it being almost impossible to look much at God without loving Him much.

Just men always demand and seek poverty of spirit and pureness of heart; and if they really understand what they are asking for, if they disguise nothing from themselves, they know that those are the two highest excellencies of Christian perfection to which a man may aspire in this world. For by poverty of spirit one detaches oneself from everything, and by purity of heart one sees, even in this world and above all things, Him who is all. Now contemplation is a sovereign means of attaining to poverty of spirit, seeing that it mortifies reason and purifies the heart, seeing that it receives no affections, either human or celestial, save in the sight of faith, having God for the perpetual object of the understanding and God for the perpetual object of the will. We may, therefore, ask for contemplation; he who seeks the end being permitted to seek the means which lead most directly to it.

And it is certain that the delight of God is to be with the children of men, as He himself declares. Now this delight cannot be in the simple habit of charity and in sanctifying grace, for those who sleep, those who are out of their minds, those who do not think of God at all, and those who actually commit some venial sin, may have, during that very time, the habitude of grace. And further, who will believe that God, who is a Reasonable Agent, can find His delight in a man, who, far from giving Him a reciprocal love, sometimes does not think of Him at all, and sometimes actually offends Him, as we have remarked. As a matter of fact, the holy Fathers explain those words of the actual communication. *Think of Me*, said God to a holy soul, *and I will think of thee!* God says in the Apocalypse that He waits at the door; that if any one hears His voice and opens the door, He will enter in to him; He will regale Himself with that just man, and that just man will regale himself with God. Contemplation listens

to God because it puts the soul in silence. It is a loving regard of God, which draws Him into the soul. We may, therefore, seek it in order that God may dwell more perfectly, more continuously, and more actually in us, and that He may communicate to us the blessings it pleases Him to give us without our laying claim to anything in particular save His love. Meditation is too active, it reflects too much, and it nearly always speaks without listening; loving contemplation on the other hand offers the whole soul to God and offers Him all its emptiness to be filled.

Moreover, one may legitimately seek a thing to which God Himself invites us. For how many times He urges us that we should come and drink of His spring, that we should dwell in His presence, that we should look at Him without ceasing, that we should pray without ceasing—and so on. We may, therefore, seek an efficacious means of carrying out His advice, and contemplation is such a means. Seeing that He Himself asks us, He unquestionably asks for some effort and some co-operation on our part, without our always expecting Him to shower down manna on us Himself.

St. Bonaventura certainly held the view that we might seek contemplation; seeing that in the little work called the *Seven Ways to Eternity*, in the first distinction of the third way he puts at the beginning as title, *What is the necessity of Contemplation?* and without quoting to you all that follows, here is what he says at the end:

*The necessity of contemplation is clearly established by what I have already said, the more that the movement made in the soul by meditation would remain imperfect, and would be of less use to the soul without the end and the repose of contemplation; also that meditation comes to an end, and passes into contemplation as into that which is the most perfect.*



Again, if, according to this Seraphic Doctor, whose advice is worth that of many others, *Contemplation is necessary to the perfection of the soul*, it follows that we may seek it and ask for it without compunction.

I say the same of infused contemplation; for all the Doctors hold that acquired contemplation is a disposition very near to that of infused contemplation; if then we may seek acquired contemplation with the help of grace, we may, with the same help, aspire to the infused, leaving to God the time and manner of arriving at it and holding ourselves on our part in profound humility, and in a great desire to please Him in that degree of perfection to which He may find it good to raise us.

It is of infused contemplation that St. Bernard speaks in the Third Book of the *Love of God* when he says, *You sigh perhaps for the repose of contemplation, and you do well. Strive, then, to attain to that holy repose by the exercise of the virtues.* We ought really to read that whole chapter, which deals entirely with infused contemplation. It would be easy for me to quote other Doctors, but they say no more in substance than those I have quoted already. Aspire more and more, therefore, Philothea, to contemplation in accomplishing with fidelity on your part all that you ought, in abandoning yourself sincerely to the *attrait* of God, who goes ahead of the souls that seek Him, and gives Himself lovingly to those who trust themselves to Him.

*Philothea.* St. Bonaventura and St. Bernard will serve me as guarantees for all the other Doctors you might quote. But I am reproached because you prescribe me a method in order to arrive at a state which is purely a gift of God; seeing that you have called your Dialogue *A Simple Method of Raising the Soul to Contemplation.*

*Director.* It is true that the gifts of God cannot be

acquired by method, but there is yet some method in disposing ourselves to receive them when once we know it is right to seek them. The method of contemplation aims at avoiding hindrances; it helps us to know what the dispositions must be on our part, and what the signs on the part of God. The method prescribes some formulæ to arouse the will by considerations and affections. Thus, Thomas of Jesus of the Order of Barefooted Carmelites wrote a book called the *Method of Divine Prayer, its Nature and its Degrees*, and another called the *Practice of the Living Faith*. And John of Jesus Maria, one of the great men of this holy Order, put at the end of his *Mystical Theology* "Epistles between God and the Soul" to reduce contemplation to a practice. It is for the same reason that St. Denis, in addressing his *Mystical Theology* to Timothy, even although he teaches that it is a gift from God, does not fail to keep some method in order to exhort his disciple. In the first chapter he writes those remarkable words:

*As for you, my dear Timothy, apply yourself seriously to mystical contemplation. Leave the senses and the operations of the understanding, leave all sensible and intelligible things, all things in general which are and all those which are not, and raise yourself by a manner unknown and ineffable, as far as is permitted to man, to union with Him who is above all nature and above all knowledge.*

St. Denis, Philothea, signifies more in those few words than I do in my whole book. Thus you see of what use method is, not only for ordinary but also for infused contemplation.

The method serves to recognize the nature of contemplation, its differences, its properties, and its effects.

Perseverance and the final grace is a gift of God, which all our works can never merit, according to the express

definition of the Church, notably in the Council of Trent. And nevertheless the Saviour of the world says to us in His Gospel, *He who perseveres to the end shall be saved*; a saying which exhorts us to do what we ought to do in order that God may do in us what we are powerless to do ourselves.

Justification is the greatest miracle which operates in the world, and yet we prescribe methods to arouse tears and contrition in order to obtain this favour.

He who wishes to recover health that is despaired of, tries the method of making devotions to some saint, hoping that he may work a miracle in his favour; and the saint cures him, not because of the number of devotions he performs or the number of rosaries he says, but for the love and faith which those devotions and rosaries have aroused in his soul. It is his faith which procures him the grace he asked of the saint.

The method is not used because of the gift, but because of him who awaits it or wishes to cultivate it. Method does not produce the miracle; it prepares the heart to receive it without opposition, without hindrance, and without scruple. There is no proportion between the natural and the supernatural, but there is some relation of the one to the other.

When Councils are summoned canonically their conclusions are infallible; yet before determining anything they examine with method the matters which have obliged them to assemble, and they define nothing till they have thoroughly debated and discussed everything. Nevertheless, it is not these discussions which cause the Holy Spirit to descend on them, but the Holy Spirit will not descend before these debatable matters are settled. All God's dealings with men are reasonable and humane, and He wishes that we should do all that we can do



before He does for us what is beyond our own powers; as St. Augustine says, *Do what thou canst and ask for what thou canst not.*

*Philothea.* It has been said to me: Your director makes contemplation too easy; he explains it so clearly that even those of mediocre intelligence can understand his book, because he takes so much trouble to make clear a matter which ought to remain obscure.

*Director.* Some have thought fit to say that I was clear, and others that I was obscure. There are eyes so sensitive that even shadows hurt them and light dazzles them. Those who have read this Treatise have been surprised at the facility with which I treat a subject so difficult and so obscure; they grieve themselves because, owing to the clearness of the Treatise, they seem to come so near to the goal, while owing to their own disposition they find themselves still far removed from it. But that is not the fault of the author; we no longer live in an age when we must hide the mysteries. Those who have made themselves obscure have either had good reason for so doing, or a natural tendency towards obscurity.

After all, this facility can deceive no one; I take the disposition towards contemplation for granted, and I remark on the signs of it; facility of understanding is a great help, but I have not claimed it as a reason for giving oneself to contemplation. On the contrary, there is nothing which more clearly discloses mistakes and abuses than the clear explanation of a matter. Obscurity sometimes serves as an excuse for the slothful, and a hindrance to feeble spirits; others would be more enlightened and more confirmed in good ways, if many writers did not affect so much obscurity, and did not try to cover so much ground in one Treatise. For in the First Treatise and in the Second, I treat of nothing but this one unique point of contemplation, which,

being once firmly established, removes great difficulties from the spiritual life; it conciliates authors who seem to contradict each other and prepares a way free from danger for all those gifts which it pleases God to communicate. For he who once thoroughly understands that God, lovingly regarded in contemplation, is above all the beauties of nature and all the gifts of grace, will await nothing and desire nothing but His good pleasure.

## DIALOGUE IX

- (i) *Whether contemplation destroys the practice of meditation.*
- (ii) *Whether one grieves God in preparing no material.*

*Philothea.* But, Father, people do not cease to object to me that contemplation will destroy the practice of meditation. They say that the Prophet King declared a blessing on those who meditated on God's Law; that the Holy Fathers meditated and wrote books of meditations, and finally, that all the Religious Orders meditate with profit and benediction.

*Director.* I hardly need to reply to your difficulty, Philothea; it resolves itself by what I have already said. Contemplation is not the destruction of meditation, it is its fruit, its plenitude, its rest, and its peace. Those who contemplate are indebted to the meditation from which they have emerged; they have sufficiently provided themselves with light and heat, and have an abundance of that on which to support themselves in need.

As for those simple souls who have not meditated regularly and methodically, God has supplied them by the abundance of His graces with sufficient knowledge. He rules them like a wise master who gives departments and offices to those who serve him, in proportion to the talent and capacity of each, and who gives to those who have not sufficient strength or industry to work, a subsistence in order to allow them to indulge in this calling and exercise. That which I established in the preceding Dialogue sufficiently answers this objection.

As for meditation on God's Law, the prophet does not



mean to say that on every occasion on which we wish to pray we must take Holy Scripture in our hands, and prescribe ourselves two or three points for meditation. He means to say that the Ancient Law under which he lived and the New Law of which he prophesied, must serve us as a mirror and an ideal to mould all the actions of our lives, which we must have continually before our eyes as the gage of Eternity and the Treaty of Alliance which God has contracted with men. He who contemplates does not in any way oppose himself to this order; he carries the Law imprinted in his heart by the loving and savourous knowledge of our mysteries and a single glance he gives at one of the points of the Law, puts him in union with God. Moreover, he can read Holy Scripture when it seems good to him for his instruction, for his consolation, or in order to explain it to others, or for a hundred other reasons which are in no wise contrary to prayer, but which also are not absolutely necessary to it. A rich man would be starved indeed if he merely amassed his riches in order to eat, and a man of prayer would be utterly empty and distracted if he never read anything except that which would help him to pray. It is certainly not necessary to read in order to pray, but it is sometimes necessary to pray in order to read well. There are times for reading and times for prayer, though it must be clearly understood that neither reading nor any other kind of application can distract him who is continually in prayer.

As for the holy Fathers, they did not leave us their meditations in order to tell us that we must always meditate, but for many other reasons: to communicate to us their lovely lights, to unburden the fullness of their hearts, and give vent to the fire of their love; and it appears quite clearly in the most excellent meditations they have left us that there were in them many more transports than

discourses, and that it was a perfect union with God Present in their souls which thus admirably spread itself out into many diverse considerations.

It is, in fact, a sufficiently remarkable thing that in the ordinary exercise of meditation, whether practised in Religious houses or in the world, no use is made of Holy Scripture as material for prayer, nor of the divine meditations of the Fathers, but that methodical books of meditation are used instead. This practice is founded on good reasons, but it lets us see, at the same time, that the meditations of the Fathers were not composed as material for prayer; they were rather a reflux of their love and admiration. The Fathers spoke highly of God because they had listened to Him well; their interior silence was more fruitful than our speech, and all that they have written communicates God to us, because it comes from no other source than God alone. If we meditate as the Fathers did we shall soon contemplate as they did; the one thing which charmed them most in their prayers was God, while we seek God last of all. We occupy ourselves round about Him but very rarely with Him, considering the things He has done and the things He has said, but not sufficiently admiring Him who has done and said them.

As to the use of meditation which is established in all the Orders, we must draw some distinctions. There are more souls capable of meditation, or at least more who give themselves up to it, than souls who can or who wish to practise contemplation. That is why it is expedient to propose meditation to the greater number as the more general way, without allowing this practice to prevent those from contemplating who feel a particular *attrait* of the Divine Spirit. For as the prayer of contemplation takes place entirely in the interior, it does not destroy the external discipline of a community. There are four

principal Rules in the Church: that of St. Basil, that of St. Benedict, the third of St. Augustine, and the last of St. Francis; and these Rules are the origin of many more. But there is not one which prescribes meditation of three or four points by way of precept, but all ordain that the soul must unite itself in holiness to God by His continual presence, and pray to Him in spirit and in truth; leaving the leading of the Holy Spirit to attract souls, whether by considerations or by affections or by a loving repose in God, who absorbs both considerations and affections, and attaches them to the wholly lovable Object.

*Philothea.* But some people tell me that it is grieving God to give oneself to prayer without preparation, just as it would grieve Him if one gave oneself to prayer without having read something beforehand to serve as its object.

*Director.* Those people grieve God, Philothea, who give themselves to such prayer without feeling His *attrait*, and a particular vocation from God to the prayer of recollection; but it is not grieving God to hold oneself in His presence in a spirit of love and adoration, and in a state of abnegation which is a tacit declaration of our nothingness before Him, even although we do not produce it by express acts. The teaching of St. François de Sales which I will quote here, word for word, should silence all such objections. Here is what he says of the excellent abnegation which the soul practices in this state:

*My dear Theotimus, let us take the liberty of framing this illustration. If a statue which its sculptor had set up in the gallery of some great prince were endowed with understanding and could reason and talk; and if it were asked, "O fair statue, tell me now, why art thou in that niche?" It would answer, "Because my master placed me there." And if one should reply, "But why stayest thou*



*there without doing anything?" "Because," it would say, "my master did not place me here to do anything but simply that I should stand here motionless." But if one should press it further saying: "But, poor statue, what art thou the better for remaining there in that sort?" "Well!" it would say, "I am not here for my own interest and service, but to obey and accomplish the will of my master and maker; and this suffices me." And if one should yet insist thus: "Tell me, then, statue, I pray, not seeing thy master, how dost thou find contentment in contenting him?" "No, verily," it would confess; "I see him not, for my eyes are not given for seeing nor my feet for walking; but I am content to know that my dear master sees me here and takes pleasure in seeing me here." But if one should continue to argue with the statue, and say unto it: "But wouldst thou not at least wish to have power to move that thou mightst approach nearer thy maker to afford him some better service?" Doubtless it would answer, "No," and would protest that it desired to do nothing but what its master wished. "Is it possible, then," one would say at last, "that thou desirest nothing but to be an immoveable statue there within that hollow niche?" "Yes, truly!" would that wise statue answer in conclusion; "I desire to be nothing but a statue and ever in this niche, so long as my master pleases, contenting myself to be here thus, since such is the wish of him whose I am and by whom I am what I am."*

*O Very God! how good a way it is of remaining in God's presence, to be and to will to be, for ever and ever, at His good pleasure!" (Treatise on the Love of God, Bk. VI, xi.)*

From which you see, Philothea, that this great man, supposing, as we have done, the *attrait* of God in souls, whether by the help of ordinary grace which raises the habit of faith, or by a quality entirely infused to this end, as we have fully explained, does not consider that one grieves God even although one remains quietly before

Him without saying anything and without doing anything. It is to grieve God to expect miracles and revelations, but not to look at Him and hold oneself in His presence.

And as regards the exact preparation, it is not necessary to read a meditation, seeing that we do not intend to meditate, but in case of need we may read something to recollect ourselves. In any case the habit of recollection becomes so strong that the mere resolution one makes to give oneself to prayer, awakes a lively presence of God which is itself a preparation and the commencement of the prayer one is about to make; or to put it better, prayer is nothing but an enhanced continuation of the perpetual prayer in which the contemplative ought to keep himself. Distracted spirits who do not practise prayer save once a day, cannot comprehend this truth; they must therefore trust to the experience of others and to the movement of grace.

I will also quote here Alvarez de Paz,<sup>1</sup> who so thoroughly plumbed all these matters. *Those, he says, who give themselves to this manner of prayer, do not grieve God even when they do nothing but put themselves in His presence and await His action; even when they prepare no material on which to meditate, or by which to inflame their souls, and even when they do in His Presence the first thing which occurs to them. They do not grieve Him at all, for it is already a great good to preserve a simple and humble sense of God's presence, and He often crowns such a state with His love or with some other devout affection.*

The same writer goes on thus: *As regards preparation, souls at the commencement of this way when they are not raised up by God Himself by a singular privilege, but being simply awakened by grace put themselves in His presence, prepare some devout affections to occupy their minds. But*

<sup>1</sup> A Spanish Jesuit of the post-Teresan period, who wrote upon mystical prayer. The passage occurs in vol. iii, cap. ii, sect. 3 of his *De Oratione*.

*after they have been long practised and sufficiently instructed and are admitted to great familiarity with God, then they have no need of preparation; for in due course, they almost always experience the force of those intercessions which the Holy Spirit itself maketh for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

I need add nothing, Philothea, to so clear and decisive a passage save to refresh your memory. Your ordinary preparation for prayer, then, must be an innocent life, and a continual presence of God. When you do that you need never fear to displease Him whatever you undertake; and you will pray for those who are tempted to oppose your way for lack of recognizing its worth.



## DIALOGUE X

- (i) *Whether the soul is idle in contemplation.*
- (ii) *How that destitution is to be understood to which the soul reduces itself in order to contemplate.*

*Philothea.* He who does not wish to grieve God, does not grieve Him. Nevertheless, Father, here are the arguments with which the adversaries of contemplation still pursue me.

Is it necessary, they say, that in the presence of the Divine Majesty the soul should remain idle and without thinking of anything whatsoever? It is a creature; it is necessary that it should acknowledge its Creator. It is a reasonable being; it is necessary that it should apply itself to Him who does so many things in it, and who has made the world for it. It is a free creature; it is necessary that it should love Him who communicates so many sublime things to it. Finally, the soul lays claim to becoming just; it is, therefore, necessary that it should practice the works of Christian justice. Instead of remaining lazy it should advance in justification, that he who is holy should make himself still more holy.

*Director.* Contemplatives are certainly in agreement with the truth stated by such people, but they would not agree with their manner of establishing it. That soul is not idle, *Philothea*, which, holding itself in the presence of God keeps interior silence in the powers of its love. For the will to keep silence is an act of veneration, the presence of God is an act of faith, and even silence itself is a homage. The soul, far from being idle, exercises a universal act

which is most noble and most excellent, in suspending particular acts in order to absorb itself in God alone, and if God, by supernatural aid, makes the soul passive as regards itself, it finds itself yet more nobly raised up. For in neither state does the soul remain benumbed; it tastes, it admires, it enjoys; and God now more sensibly, now more interiorly, now more intimately present, becomes its strength and support. The soul is neither slothful nor lazy; on the contrary, as it is not occupied save with one special subject alone, it is the more disposed to give itself to all that God wills. As creature, it gladly recognizes its Creator, seeing that it annihilates itself in His presence and that its act is a tacit declaration that it finds nothing in its own depths worthy of His Sovereign Majesty. In the character of a reasonable soul, it voluntarily submits its reason, and raises itself by the help of faith; recognizing that God is above it as well as within it, it does not seek Him outside of itself or beneath itself, but adores Him within itself and above itself, that is to say by faith, which surpasses reason but is never contrary to it. Most Christians have the habit of faith, most of the just make many acts of faith, but those who contemplate wish to exercise a continual act, as far as is possible to nature by the help of grace. The creature is free, we are told; but it never makes a more perfect use of its liberty than when it abandons it all to God, and no longer wishes to act save by His instigation, accomplishing in it this saying of the Apostle, *Those who are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*. For wheresoever the Spirit of God reigns, there reigns true liberty. We shall be truly free when the Son of God has delivered us.

But from what will He deliver us, Philothea? From sin, to which we are enslaved; from the clumsy and limited conceptions within which we confine the immensity of

God; from tender and material affections with which we think to hold God as with a holy grapnel, while He would enfold us and give Himself to us utterly, and not merely in little feelings and flashes. He will deliver us from heaven, He will deliver us from earth, He will deliver us from all things, from everything which is not God, and from everything which cannot draw us to God, however noble and exalted it may be, if it attracts us without the sovereign will of God.<sup>1</sup>

Draw us after Thee, O God, and we will run to the sweetness of Thy embrace. But do not, we pray Thee, let Thy sweetness alone have the power to draw us, for no man can come to Thee, Thou most loving Saviour, by all the sweet savour of devotion, if Thy Father does not Himself draw him, if He does not give to creatures the power to attract him. For without this influx of grace on us and on all things, everything may draw us away from God. Thy humanity itself, my Saviour, which is the most precious of all creatures, not being regarded as it should have been, deceived the Jews, tempted the Apostles, and every day keeps people of real devotion from the way of perfection. Because the Jews did not recognize Thy Divinity, the Apostles did not sufficiently regard it, and the devout did not realize it, stopping short at the humanity.

The soul is not idle, Philothea, when it takes its rest in God; but beyond this act, which keeps it constantly occupied, God never fails to send it good inspirations and salutary thoughts. The contemplative does not spend all his time as some people think, in driving away temptations and distractions; sometimes three or four hours may pass with so much facility and sweetness, that if discretion did

<sup>1</sup> This splendid and characteristic outburst, which may seem at first sight excessive, does not really go beyond the classic doctrine of Christian mysticism. Cf. the *Cloud of Unknowing*, cap. vii, or St. John of the Cross, the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book III, cap. xv.



not rule this path, the soul would consume itself in a short time. Believe me, nature cannot deceive us in this matter, and as souls who are truly called soon taste the fruits of this prayer, so those who are not thus called soon feel the thorns. I base my argument largely on this principle of the Gospel, *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

In the ordinary way, one must exercise the virtues one after the other in order to acquire facility in making acts; one must take attachments in particular and break each one by a different exercise; one must attack one's imperfections with sufficient strategy and industry to destroy them. But this happy, this lovely presence of God, this loving and universal act, so questioned and so resisted by men, establishes the virtues, breaks off attachments, surmounts imperfections, and one finds oneself free and disengaged when occasion arises, sometimes without having had one single thought in prayer of the blessings God has the mercy to prepare for us.

That is why I will finish this Dialogue as St. Denis commences his, with Timothy. Let go, Philothea, of all created things, all sensible things, all intelligible things, everything that is affective, in fact everything which is, and everything which is not, in order to throw yourself into the very heart of God; who will give you everything you may have abandoned, accompanied with power and efficacy to love Him more ardently. This will either make you produce the acts necessary to you, or else hold you in that blessed silence which is worth all acts.

A great philosopher of our own day believed that in order to acquire true philosophy and re-establish it in its purity, it was necessary that the human spirit should make an effort to disengage itself from all its past knowledge, and that it should forget all that it had learned. That, then,

guiding itself by the principles it had formulated, all its knowledge would become purer and more perfect; that truth would appear in its true character, and that wisdom would be renewed. This is not the place to argue whether such a foundation of philosophy is reasonable, but in the path of which we are talking, it is certain that he who gives up everything, recovers that which he has given up, more perfect and more complete; having God for principle, for means, and for end of the knowledge of heaven and the re-establishment of spiritual man.

This blessed ignorance is the mistress of knowledge, and darkness is here the essence of day and of light. How great God seems, Philothea, to him who knows Him without images, how ineffable, how inestimable! There are souls who would not give one ray of this luminous darkness for all the knowledge of the universe; and God, who cannot make Himself comprehended of His creatures, has found the means to make them understand that He is incomprehensible; and to love His incomprehensibility. He who sees God in this darkness, Philothea, sees a great abyss; and this darkness has no light save that which is necessary to show the soul the abyss, and to plunge it into such great amazement that in certain moments it no longer sees heaven and earth, men or angels, save as atoms lost in this infinite abyss. The soul rejoices that God should be incomprehensible, that there is nothing like unto Him. Love Him, admire Him, adore Him within this august obscurity; and prize the obscurity you are reproached for much more than the occupations on which the world prides itself, and even many devout persons who lose their peace in seeking it with too much eagerness and activity.

*Philothea.* How good it is to have doubts and difficulties! It seems that the confirmation of truth may be something

even better than truth itself, and the agitation one has suffered makes the soul more assured after it has been enlightened. I value my path much more now than I did before. But what should I reply when I am reproached with the great destitution in which I now am, in so far that many think the height of my prayer to consist purely in this destitution?

*Director.* Those who speak thus of your destitution confuse the foundation for the building, and the disposition for the prayer it serves. Architects first dig the foundations deeply out of the earth when they wish to build a palace, and the beginning of their work is a yawning pit which alarms those who see it. But the vaster the pit the more imposing will the building be, and the firmer the foundations. He who annihilates himself in the presence of God does not pretend to establish his perfection in his annihilation; but he is confident that God will fill his nothingness with all that He is Himself, and that He only empties the soul in order to fill it again. In truth, the more the creature is destroyed, the more the Creator will be glorified in the creature. Please God, Philothea, please God that those who do not desire your method of prayer may at least desire your destitution, and that they may go thoroughly stripped of themselves to the meditation they make every day. That would mean that they would see the immensity of God, and the smallness of self, and that they would make such a good meditation that they would no longer disapprove of contemplation.

These persons resemble certain pilgrims who go to Loreto or Santiago on foot, pilgrim's staff in hand, but who carry a full purse in order that they may not want. Their devotion is good and their penitence of great merit; but a poverty utterly abandoned to Divine Providence is something even greater and more praiseworthy than this



worthy pilgrimage. Those who practise meditation go on foot, staff in hand: I mean to say that they have humility and confidence in God, but they carry so many acts and so many considerations of their nothingness and their spiritual poverty, that often they are neither really poor nor really detached. That which they do is praiseworthy so long as they do it from vocation, and so long as they add nothing to their vocation; but the annihilation of their powers is something more august, more worthy of the majesty of God. To calm the senses, make reason keep silence, command one's own will, and humble all one's powers in the presence of God, is perfect homage, true love, and the disposition for all the graces. So much so that that which deceives many people is that they make contemplation consist in that void of images and forms which spiritual writers so expressly recommend. But this void is certainly nothing but a disposition towards the plenitude of God, who, having once succeeded in persuading souls to have Him always present to them, makes them afterwards do everything that He pleases; that is to say, everything those souls do who meditate and everything they do not do—acts of acknowledgment, of love, of confidence, and suchlike, according to the disposition in which God finds the soul, or according to His good pleasure—in a simple, strong, gentle, and almost imperceptible manner.

The general and close-knit act of contemplation often expands, like a bouquet of flowers which is in itself a unity, and yet allows many scents to be smelt at the same time, many colours to be seen simultaneously. The heart is so ravished by this rich profusion that in order to lose none of its rapture, it does not take the trouble to look at each flower in detail, even though it recognizes them and is aware of their diversity. In the same way the general

act remains as a rule so pure and so simple, that the soul does not know how to say what it is, if not that it feels itself supported and filled, and that it is certain that God is present to it. But this act sometimes spreads out into so many other acts that the soul is astonished and delighted; and still it only enjoys one act, and it takes no account of the others it recognizes.

Empty your soul, Philothea, and God will fill it. This voluntary void is a depth from which God draws many diverse and admirable forms. It contains lights and shadows, tendernesses and drynesses, enjoyments and sufferings, but, above all, a great detachment from everything which is not God, even from His graces and favours, to attach oneself inviolably to God alone.

*Philothea.* May those devout souls leave me my destitution, and I will leave them their riches; and I pray God that neither one nor other of us may ever oppose ourselves to His most holy will.

## DIALOGUE XI

- (i) *Whether one should read in order to contemplate.*
- (ii) *How one should use vocal prayer.*

*Philothea.* Tell me, Father, should one never read when in this way of prayer?

*Director.* St. Augustine and St. Thomas were seraphic contemplatives, yet nevertheless they read and wrote during nearly the whole of their lives. Every one may read when it pleases him; for his profession, his need, or the instruction of his neighbour. But there are three things, *Philothea*, for which a contemplative must never read. First, he must never read books of meditation with any design of meditating on them; in order that he may do nothing contrary to his *attrait*, nor fall into some inconstancy under pretext of making a good meditation. Such books may induce a soul to form distinct acts, and thus obscure and stifle the general act, and particularly so in those who are only beginning to enter on this path: for those already far advanced are not easily diverted from their aim.

Secondly, contemplatives must never read out of pure curiosity such spiritual books as are beyond their capacity and out of their true path. For imagination sometimes deceives us, and especially women. We conceive an indiscreet desire to attain to extraordinary gifts to which God does not yet call us, and to which He will perhaps never call us; this may cause over-eagerness, impatience, envy, and a desire of possession altogether contrary to that spiritual abnegation which he who contemplates must practise. And moreover, a strong and lively imagination



takes forms and impressions from that which it reads, and sometimes imagines itself to be in all the states into which the Saints may have entered.

It is by its fruits that we know the tree. In a soul which feigns goodness, vice discloses itself and self-love gives itself away. Such imaginary gifts compared to real gifts are as straw and gravel compared to fine gold. The soul remains more proud, more self-willed, more eager, and more self-occupied than before. The grace of God, on the contrary, fortifies us in temptation, humbles us in times of joy and abundance, and always leaves the soul more filled with God, more in love with the Cross, and more opposed to the false maxims of the world.

Lastly, contemplatives must never read from scrupulousness, as for instance, to seek again and again to confirm themselves in their vocation. Similar doubts make souls lax and undetermined as to what they should do; reading confuses them; they seek incessantly for new signs and new conjectures, and when they find a book which varies slightly in its manner of explanation, they think that all is lost, that they have been mistaken, and that they must change their way. From the time when one's way of life is once established according to the signs one has received, the fruits one has gathered, and the advice one has sought, one must not deliberate any longer; one must go forward, for he who doubts falls back. Temptations against one's vocation must be mistrusted above all others, because they are the most dangerous.

But truly, when the soul does have extraordinary experiences, then it is good to read in order to learn how to comport oneself; but it is necessary to seek advice from a Director concerning the book and the whole matter, and to take care to read nothing in the book in question which does not concern our state. Too much reading and

seeking in mystical books, Philothea, without necessity and without guidance, causes more ill than good, and confuses souls instead of enlightening them.

*Philothea.* I would rather read books which would help to nourish in me the love of God, than those which merely arouse curiosity. Love is a great master, Father, and its fire gives more light than all the teaching of men.

But I want to ask your advice also concerning vocal prayer, whether one should use it much or little in the way of contemplation?

*Director.* The farther prayer is removed from the tongue, the nearer it draws to the heart. It is commonly said that great sorrows are dumb, and it is true that all the passions, when they arrive at their height, speak very little or not at all; that is to say if the heart, being over-full and, as it were, oppressed by its object, does not take refuge in speech, and break out suddenly in sensible transports and striking effusions.

The love of God, when it is pure, serene, and tranquil, possesses the soul in such a way that it often does not leave it liberty either to think or to speak. The voice was only given to us in order to declare our sentiments, but from the moment a good heart offers them to God, a just soul who tastes God so present, so familiar and so intimate, has some difficulty in opening its mouth to tell God that which He already knows, and that which the heart has already presented to Him. For it is sometimes a sign of doubt to use the voice to assure God of that which the heart feels. It is as if the soul wished to assure itself of its own act, and to recall to feeling a faith which is so much the more pure when it is more spiritual. The fact is that the soul wishes to taste and savour the love of God by exclaiming about it and showing it forth, and it does not see that it is thus converting it into its own self-love.

There are men who resemble those voluptuous creatures who chew and taste the morsel they wish to enjoy so eagerly that their mouths are filled with nothing but water; the palate is refreshed, but the heart is not rejoiced. In the same way, by conversations and exterior prayers one sometimes satisfies rather one's self-love in God, than inflames oneself by God.

I notice in Holy Scripture that great things are generally asked for by a very short prayer; Tobias and Sarah, after having celebrated their marriage, spent three nights in prayer, and the prayer of Sarah consisted only of these words, *Have pity on us! Lord! mercifully ordain that we may become aged together.* And Tobias in his heart repeated the same prayer a hundred times, by a loving presence of God, without using many acts or repeating many words. David asks pardon for his adultery in a Psalm which is not very long; it was the heart that showed penitence and said a hundred times without saying it, *Have mercy on me!* If the prayers of the Patriarchs and Prophets were sometimes longer, it was because their words comprised prophecies which concerned the future.

All the great miracles which the Saviour works in the Gospels are obtained with short prayers: *Son of David! have mercy on us!* say the blind men, and they recover their sight. *Have mercy on me!* says the Canaanite woman, *my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil!* The crown and glory of her prayer was the perseverance of her faith. *Lord!* said the leper, *If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!* and the confession he makes of the power of the Saviour allows him to feel the effects of it in his body. And the holy Mother of Our Saviour, who was the model of prayer, when she wished to obtain the famous miracle at the Marriage of Cana, said nothing but those words, *They have no wine!* and the water was changed into wine. The



Saviour of the world Himself, in His agony, only repeated a very short prayer, three times: *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.*

He has advised us not to let the strength of our prayers consist in a multitude of words, and He Himself has prescribed for us a form of prayer which is conceived with extreme brevity. It is to be noted that in this prayer there is no multiplication of terms, no expression of great effort, but merely a simple expression of the desires and requests it contains. *Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.* One word says more when the heart is filled with love and faith than long prayers uttered by a languishing and distracted spirit.

St. Benedict followed in the footsteps of his Master. *Let us remember, he says in his Rule, that not for our much speaking but for our purity of heart and tears of compunction shall we be heard. Our prayer, therefore, ought to be short and pure, except perchance it be prolonged by the inspiration of Divine Grace. But when we are gathered together it is ever to be brief. (Rule of St. Benedict, cap. xx.)* In fact, Philothea, most vocal prayers consist of nothing but the voice; the tongue is not here the echo or interpreter of the heart. It is true that sometimes alongside its office of interpreter it arouses and urges the heart, but when the heart refuses to be aroused, it is disgusted, it dissipates its force, and seems to disavow by its conduct everything uttered by the tongue. Our Lord might well say of those who pray in this manner what He said of old of the Jewish people, *This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.*

And Rabanus, explaining the words I have quoted from St. Benedict, says: *The reason why we must make brief prayer is lest religious should fall asleep during prayer that*

*is too long, and in order that, remaining for a long time dormant, the devil may not permit a thousand phantoms to pass before their eyes, nor put into their hearts any other thing than God.*

The same writer adds that prayer must not be prolonged, lest a cough or a sneeze or any other thing may come to interrupt it, and in order that the short prayer, being of ardent heat, may be snatched from the jaws of the devil, by the diligence necessary to achieve it. Prayer should be the joy and solace of the heart, instead of being a weight and labour.

It serves no end to quote in this connection the offices of the Church; those prayers offered during the solemnity of public worship, which must be sensible and striking in order to arouse the devotion of the faithful. Moreover, as we incline much more to slackness than to fervour, most priests have need of a longish office, as a means of occupation as well as a method of prayer. And again, while the most perfect among them can do with less vocal prayer, it is right that they should accommodate themselves to the capacity of the greater number for whom the law should be made. Moreover, God makes good, by the abundance of interior prayer, the dissipation which exterior worship may cause, and our obligations never divert us from our vocation.

I say, therefore, Philothea, that every one should gladly recite the vocal prayers which the Church or his own Rule have imposed on him, as well as those prayers for which the soul may have some *attrait*. But as for those who are under no special obligation, they must take what suffices them, some more and some less, according to the spirit and the devotion of each one; the Church not having expressly prescribed any special number of prayers for those who live in the world.



Let St. Thomas sum up for us, he who, being a religious and obliged in consequence to recite the Divine Office, explains himself as to vocal prayer nevertheless as a true Doctor. He says that the general prayer the Church offers for the faithful is a distinct thing, and that this must be vocal, and even uttered in a loud voice in order that it may be heard by the people for whom it is offered; but it is not thus as regards the prayer which each one offers for himself. The prayer of individuals, he says, need not of necessity be vocal, but it may be; and that for three reasons. First, in order to arouse interior devotion which can raise the spirit to God, because the understanding of man is in the habit of being moved either by words or by exterior actions, and because the will closely follows the impulse of the understanding, to inflame it to good. That was why St. Augustine, writing to Proba, said that we arouse ourselves with more vehemence by words and by other exterior things to make holy desire grow in us. And that is why, in private or individual prayer, we must only make use of the voice and exterior signs as much as is necessary to arouse the soul to devotion. For if, as St. Thomas goes on, the soul finds itself more distracted by such things, or if it is hindered in some way from satisfying its devotion, it must leave all those exterior things. That is what happens in those whose souls who are sufficiently disposed to devotion, without having all the signs of it. That is why the Prophet says (Psalm xxvii): *When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.* And it is said of Hannah in 1 Samuel that "She spake in her heart."

The second reason, says St. Thomas for making use of vocal prayer, is as a form of duty, in order that man may serve God by everything that he holds from God, that is



to say, not only by the spirit, but also by the flesh and the whole being.

And finally, we use vocal prayer through a certain reflex action of the soul on the body, following some vehement affection, according to the words of the Psalm: *My heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him.* The holy Doctor adds a little later, *Words which signify something capable of leading to devotion arouse souls, and especially those which have least devotion.* Note these words well, Philothea, for St. Thomas makes devotion consist in interior zeal (*Summa*, Part II, 2, Question 83, Art. 12). And it is also to be remarked that that which he prescribes as regards vocal prayer must also be understood as regards reading, and all exterior things which may arouse devotion, what St. Thomas calls the sign of devotion.

I do not approve, then, any more than St. Thomas, of using too much vocal prayer. For if some Saints have recited the Psalter every day, we must judge of that as of their exterior penances; these are devotions, not rules. The wisdom of God is admirable in the diversity of its ways. When it pleases Him that we should use much exterior prayer, whether as a good example or for any other special reason, He then has the goodness to take possession of the soul with more warmth, to the end that it should not dissipate itself without. But this is a favour which those who make these long prayers and practise such exterior things without advice and through self-love in devotion, need not expect.

## DIALOGUE XII

*Recapitulation of the whole matter of contemplation with special explanations.*

*Philothea.* It seems to me that I have perfectly understood what you have taught me about contemplation. I can only hope that my practice may be true to the knowledge you have given me, and that I may bring as much fidelity to maintaining myself in it, and to advancing myself to the state in which God would have me, as you have had patience in explaining to me. But please think it permissible to have yet another talk with me, in which I will ask you briefly about things which you may have already explained to me, in order to impress them more firmly on my mind, and to give you at the same time an opportunity of teaching me other things which may serve to my advancement, and which have not been touched on in the preceding Dialogues.

*Director.* I am heartily ready to do as you wish, Philothea. Repetition of great truths brings new unction and new light to those who make it. The things of God never weary those who taste them, because in them they seek God rather than their own satisfaction. The word of God is a light, and no one tires of seeing light. The word of God is the bread of souls, and no one tires of eating bread, for without this universal food of our bodies, better foods are insipid and the greatest sweetnesses breed disgust. All the same, I do not propose to give you merely a repetition; I will teach you in a new way things you know

already as well as many things you have not yet learnt. For the rest, I will reply very briefly to your questions, and I will see that my replies are complete without being obscure. Let us see, then, what you have to ask me, and satisfy your spiritual curiosity to the full.

*Philothea.* Once more, then, Father: What is contemplation?

*Director.* I should like to give you several definitions of this same contemplation, which will thus imprint the idea more firmly on your mind, and will serve you now on one point, now on another, according to the need you may have. The windows of our houses are made in an infinity of different shapes and sizes, and yet through whatever window the light enters, it is always the same. The shape of the window does not affect it.

Contemplation, *Philothea*, is a prayer of silence and repose, in which the whole soul is recollected in adoration of God Present. It is a prayer: and if all prayer is a raising up of the spirit to God, this is a very perfect prayer which leaves all particular considerations of heaven and earth, however holy and devout, in order to apply itself to the consideration of the Master of heaven and earth; in which the soul shows clearly that it seeks nothing but Him, seeing that it leaves everything for Him. Ordinary prayer speaks to God or speaks of God, but this prayer looks at God. It is not a simple effort to go to God; it is intimacy with God. We are invited to consider God as our Father. Now, always to reason about Him and inform ourselves as to what He is, this is only the glory of His servants; but to rejoice in that which He is, by a lively faith in His presence, that is the consolation of His children.

Contemplation is therefore a prayer, but a prayer of silence. The tongue does not know what to say of Him: He is ineffable. The mind does not know what to think



of Him: He is incomprehensible. The will does not know what to will or what to desire; He is infinitely lovable. The memory dare not remind itself of anything in reminding itself of Him who is all. Why, therefore, deceive the imagination with pious images? The soul tastes and possesses the truth. This silence, attained by grace and *attrait*, is followed by a great peace; for to contemplate is not simply to cease to act; it is to rest in God, and to gather up in this repose all the actions of the soul. Sleep is not simply a cessation of being awake; it is a refreshment of body, a restoration of nature.

I have said that in this prayer the whole soul is recollected in adoration of God; for what homage can be more pure than that in which we come to rest in God Pure? The soul is recollected in admiration, in affection, and in joy, which for all that are neither acts nor different movements; but a melting up and gushing forth of the love of God. Nevertheless, the highest point of this recollection is attained through faith, which does not cease when the other *attraits* cease, and which always possesses its object.

I have said that the soul adores God Present, because most men adore Him as if He were far removed from them. The tongue invites Him, the understanding seeks Him, the will desires Him, the memory recalls Him, the imagination pictures Him. All this is good, all this is worship, all this is love. But it is a thing more worthy of God to find God and to find Him everywhere; recognizing Him even in our own heart which He asks us most of all to do, and which is the true way to love Him.

This prayer adores God Present and not simply in His presence, because it does not consist in representing to ourselves some image of the Divine. Through faith and grace it has acquired this habit by the exercise of a Presence

so real, that, morally speaking, it cannot doubt that God is its familiar objective, and that it is in its own power to think of Him when it wills, without eagerness, without effort, and almost without any movement. The soul is so seized by this lovable object that it carries it with it everywhere; the soul is active in the commerce of life without disturbing the interior commerce; it sees, it hears, it goes about, and God is always present to it; it falls asleep, and it awakes in this Object.<sup>1</sup>

*Philothea.* Blessed habit! Blessed necessity! Blessed possession! to carry God in one's heart at all times and in all places! How difficult it is to separate oneself from God by sin, when one is united to Him by a continual loving presence!

Could you perhaps furnish me with some comparisons to make me understand more fully this sureness and this inseparability of the presence of God?

*Director.* The comparison of an echo is suitable for your end. An echo is the reflection of the voice from an empty and hollow rock which sends it back. When one is in such places it is impossible to say a word which is not sent back by the echo. When the soul is empty of everything except of that living fire which is God, it is impossible to do or say anything without everything re-echoing this presence. All things say *God*, and the soul responds interiorly, *God*; for as every object which passes imprints its notion or idea on the soul, so the soul being filled by the Divine, every thought, according

<sup>1</sup> In reading the whole of the Twelfth Dialogue, with its fervent and beautiful descriptions of the achieved contemplative state, we have to remember that Malaval is no longer instructing the beginner, or the proficient, but giving a picture of the finished product; the established "theopathic life" of the man of prayer who has reached union with God. Were these comparisons intended to be of general application to all "recollected" souls, they would certainly be excessive. But this is not the author's meaning.

to its quality, either makes it love God or mistrust everything which is not God.

One finds in certain houses inner doors with little bells fixed on them; it is not possible to open such doors gently enough to avoid making some noise, or to go in or out without warning those within. Thus, Philothea, whether things enter the soul or leave it, they must always awaken this idea of God, and they warn the soul that God is there. The habit of this presence produces an act which is almost continuous, and the soul can no more forget God than it can forget itself.

Thus contemplation, to define it for you anew, is a fixed presence of God. I do not say simply a habit, for one finds habits even in those who sleep, and such habits have, strictly speaking, no merit. Neither is this an ordinary exercise made only at certain hours and on certain occasions; it is a continuous act which is nothing, properly speaking, but the repetition of the same act, but so gently and easily produced by the force of habit that one would say it was one sole act; just as one sees that the eyes produce at one moment an infinity of glances, though the natural faculty of sight seems to render them only one single glance.

Contemplation is also a general sight of God Present. I say a sight, because it is an act of that understanding which is the eye of the soul, just as the will is the eye of the heart. Sight has this characteristic, that it takes place in a moment, and that it is performed by the eye without effort; while speech only comes from the lips one syllable after the other and strikes the ear in a succession of sounds. The reasoning of meditation resembles speech; it is formed of one thought after another and is thus always in some kind of motion. Contemplation, on the contrary, is more like sight; it attains its object in



one instant, and it reposes in that object without speech and without thought.

This sight is general because it considers God in all that He is, and not by His attributes in particular. All the Divine attributes have a relation to some created thing, or else they are taken from similitudes of human reason. In order to conceive power it is necessary to conceive the works power produces; and in order to conceive immensity it is necessary at least to imagine a term of place and a term of plenitude. But in order to conceive God in Himself, it is not necessary to have recourse to any created thing in particular, it is only necessary to believe by a lively faith that God is the Being of Beings and the Perfection of Perfections. After the orators had said a multitude of fine things about Alexander or Cæsar, they embraced everything in one single expression; they considered they had said everything in the words, *It is Cæsar, It is Alexander*. The soul which has heard or read many things about God says in conclusion to all that it knows, *It is God!* and in regarding God it ratifies all that it knows, all that men and angels know, everything God comprehends in His essence. The soul is an altar which dedicates itself with that inscription which was put on an altar at Athens, *To the unknown God*. This sight is therefore general, because it embraces all that is known of the Divine Nature and because it adores all that is unknown. It is not that the sight of some attribute of God, whatsoever it might be, would not be a good contemplation, but that the general contemplation of God is more perfect, and satisfies the soul more than any other.

*Philothea*. How is this general contemplation the most perfect?

*Director*. God, having created the soul to be His temple, has created it with an infinite capacity. The more it

knows, the more it longs to know; the more it loves, the more it longs to love; it has a longing for infinite knowledge and a longing for infinite love. In fact, man is never satisfied in this world, and this is a proof of his immortality and of the sovereign happiness for which he is made. All that the most perfect things of this world can do is to occupy the soul; nothing but God can fill it.

But, Philothea, we are obliged in this very life to love God with all our strength and with all the capacity of our hearts; the Law of God commands us to do this, and it cannot command anything impossible. And to love Him with all our hearts, we must love Him as He is, for neither anything He has made in heaven or earth, nor anything we can imagine or conceive in our little way, is as lovable as God. To love Him as He is in Himself, it is necessary to know Him as He is in Himself, for the will is a blind power which can only love things in the way the understanding represents them to it. If, therefore, the understanding represents God to the will under particular images, it will not love Him save in His perfection, or in His works; but if it represents Him as He is in Himself, it will love Him in Himself. In fact, the commandment which imposes on us this glorious obligation to love God with all our strength, orders us also to love Him with all our thought, that is to say, to make Him the most perfect objective of our understanding as we have made Him the most pure objective of our hearts. Also, nothing but God can satisfy the natural activity of the understanding, and nothing but God can satisfy the natural ardour of the will. So that even in this world the good man is happy because he possesses in God all that he can know, and all that he can love. General contemplation is, therefore, the most perfect, the more that through the repose of a living faith it makes us embrace and, as it were,

comprehend the incomprehensible, and by that outflow of love which follows faith, it makes us love infinitely that which is infinitely lovable.

And moreover, not only is God the one objective which can satisfy our understanding and our will, but there is nothing but God alone which can impress on us this overwhelming desire to become happy and to possess the Sovereign Good. He does this not only as the Author of grace, but also as the Author of the nature of man; it follows from this that the wicked have an ardent desire to be happy, and to be satisfied as well as the good; God, who is wanting in nothing, impressing on all this universal light, with the same goodness with which He makes the sun to rise on the good and on the bad, and sends His rain to the sinner as well as to the righteous. For it is more worthy of His wisdom to provide for the spiritual good even in the order of that nature of which He is the Creator, than to provide for the bodily good. Moreover, a particular cause can never give this movement towards the universal Good; no one can give save that which he has, and no individual being can communicate happiness, because he does not possess it. Now if to this general influence of the Author of nature, God comes to add a movement of grace, this grace cleanses the eyes from creaturely shadows and makes us see clearly that which before we saw with difficulty. Thus universal contemplation is more perfect because, adding the light of grace and of faith to the light of nature, it discloses to us the Good in itself and makes us love it for what it is.

This is the doctrine of St. Augustine in a thousand places where he speaks of God as immovable truth. It is also the doctrine of St. Thomas when he speaks of God as a good, and as a universal power. Men read that,



Philothea, they know it, they discuss it, but since love and humility, which are lacking to them, are unable to give them the veritable taste, they regard these wonderful truths as speculations and learned ideas without gathering from them the fruits the holy Fathers had intended. In which they resemble those people who read of the marvels of the Indies and the New World rather from curiosity, and as a form of entertainment, than because they wish to believe in them themselves.

Contemplation may also be defined as a loving wisdom which tastes God Present. Wisdom is knowledge of the truth through its highest cause. He who holds the rudder of a ship is called wise in his art, seeing that he knows the stars and the winds necessary to navigation, while the sailors are merely occupied with sails and ropes. The architect is called wise in the art of building because he draws the plan which is the ultimate design of the building, while the masons merely deal with the stones and other materials.

He who contemplates God has true wisdom; for he contemplates God because He is God, which is the most noble manner of knowing Him. Such wisdom loves Him and tastes Him; it does not reason, it believes; it does not seek, it enjoys. The knowledge of God, when we do not hinder its effect, produces love just as the light of the sun infallibly produces heat when it does not meet with either wind or cloud but beats down upon the earth. Let men believe what they will, Philothea, it is impossible to look at God without loving Him, or to look at Him always without loving Him always, for the object of such regard is infinitely lovable. Nature is inclined to love the Sovereign Good; faith allows us to see it as it is; the *attrait* of grace invites us to see it and love it; the perpetual presence confirms and familiarizes this love, and always

brings an ever greater inpouring which drowns us in the torrent of the Divine.

From all that I have said, Philothea, it follows that contemplation is a pure, simple, and general sight of God Present; general without particular conceptions; pure without images; simple without discussion or ratiocination: because God is not any particular object, He is no image, no term, no proposition of human reason, so that the more our act is general, pure, and simple, the more it will be proportioned to a God most general, most pure, and most simple, and the more perfectly we will then contemplate Him.

Let us rejoice, Philothea, that God should be thus infinitely lovable and that He should be incomprehensible, but let us also rejoice for this, that by His goodness we can in some manner love and know Him in an infinite way, in contemplating Him as that which He is in Himself. The symbol of faith proposes God to us in Himself, and not only in His works. The Law obliges us to love Him above everything else. The Scriptures tell us that He is He who is; and all creatures, by their imperfections, tell us what He is not, in order that we may raise ourselves to that which He is. Let us regard Him ceaselessly, for He regards us ceaselessly. Let us regard Him, not so much to see Him as to admire Him, not so much to know Him as to meet Him; and let us ever hold fast this pure and simple sight of God. The more this sight empties us of everything, the more it will fill us with God. Nevertheless, Philothea, we must contrive, as much as we can, according to the disposition and *attrait* of each one, that this sight should be loving. For even while of Himself God brings love into the soul, we can hinder His effect by our imperfections and by our feeble co-operation with grace. But if we regard God with love, then love



will augment contemplation, and contemplation will inflame love.

*Philothea.* I agree that this general contemplation of God is the most perfect, but I must still ask you to tell me in a word how it becomes general.

*Director.* God is nothing of that which the exterior senses show us. He is nothing of that which the imagination expresses. He is nothing of that which reason conceives, because all that we know through the powers of the soul is finite, and God is infinite. All that we know is comprehensible; God alone is incomprehensible. It follows, then, that when by an effort of natural reason we wish to know God in His nature by His resemblance to things which we know, either we change the creature into God like the idolaters, who, in seeking God through reason, made gods for themselves out of all manner of things; or else we bring God down to the creature, like so many profane people who degrade Him by impiety, or ignorant people who abase Him through ignorance. We must, therefore, purge our spirits of images of all created things, and our wills of affection for those things, in order to know God alone in Himself and love God alone in Himself. It is not that men do not know God through natural reason, but that they know rather that He is, than what He is; and this knowledge is turned by the corruption of our nature into darkness, and does not give man any power to strip himself of his passions, which makes this darkness deeper.

It is here with man as with a traveller, who, following a rather difficult road to travel from his own country to another, and not being able to find his way save by following certain marks which have been left along the roadside, would, out of caprice, rub out and do away with those marks. For then, when he had arrived at the end of his



journey, he would not be able to find the way back again to his own country, and could do nothing but stray from the road and lose himself. Man knows God through the vestiges of nature, but as he abuses those vestiges and changes them or obliterates them by the unruliness of his passions, he no longer sees the traces which would lead him to God, and thus he precipitates himself into a thousand errors.

Faith then comes to the help of nature: it represents to it an infinite God, infinitely lovable. And as the light of Glory puts the blessed in possession of that which God is, so faith is a light which puts us in possession of that which the blessed see. We see the same God, but they see Him clearly, while we see Him obscurely. They know that which He is, while we ratify that which they know. They see that He is not any one of His creatures, and we also believe that He is not of the created world. But this faith, Philothea, is not a simple acquiescence of human reason in the truth, as when we believe what people tell us every day in the world. It is a supernatural light which makes man firmly and invariably consent to believe the existence of God. Such light is not reasoning, for then it would be clear, and its object would be clear also. It is an obscure light, and its subject is obscure. In quality of light it confirms, and in quality of obscurity it sovereignly detaches the soul from all that it knows by reason of that which is clear and fitting. God, says faith, is neither nature, nor created image, nor possibility; He is that which He is, and He is all. In consequence, Philothea, faith comprehends all that knowledge can conceive of God and all that it cannot conceive.

Thus contemplation is an act of faith in God Present, which by the help of grace becomes continual and familiar,

and thus it is universal like its light and its object. Faith produces contemplation and contemplation illumines Faith. In the same way, we see that a grain of mustard seed produces a great plant which was enclosed in its germ, and that afterwards this plant itself produces an infinity of seeds and germs. For contemplation augments faith in an extraordinary way; it makes it more efficacious, more penetrating, more luminous, and more universal than ever before. By dint of reasoning with nature, the spirit makes itself strong, and by dint of believing through grace, the spirit renders itself divine. Ah, Philothea! this marvellous exercise of faith is the blessing of this life. *Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed*, because great faith, exercised through contemplation, produces great love, and a very close and very perfect union with God who is our felicity.

*Philothea.* How is it possible that prayer illumines faith, seeing that faith, in order to be faith and to have the merit of submission and of this voluntary captivity to which reason subjects itself, must by its very nature be obscure?

*Director.* Faith always remains obscure because of its object, but it draws from the light which comes from prayer, a greater force, a greater certitude, and a greater penetration. Iron which has simply been held near the fire becomes hot, but when it has been made red-hot in the fire, one would say that fire and iron were one, so well are they blended and incorporated together. By great exercise of contemplation one would say that reason becomes faith, or that faith becomes reason, so greatly has the soul the certitude and the conviction of that which it believes. Much more, then, Philothea, a greater light of contemplation produces a greater and more admirable obscurity; that is to say, that it makes God appear to us

ever more incomprehensible, and, so to speak, more infinite, more and more above reason, and it is in that that this light is veritably light. *Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me*, says the Bride in the Canticle. *I am black, but comely*. She was dark, says one of the Fathers, not with horrible darkness, but with the darkness of profundity; her Bridegroom obscured her in illuminating her.

The first light which God created in the world showed nothing at first but a great chaos, and the living light of faith makes us see God as a great abyss. That is why we call contemplation a confused act of God Present, not confused by any disorder, but by our lack of comprehension. We see confusedly what the blessed see clearly, and we see in an enigma what they contemplate in God as in its proper light. God is in heaven a tree of Life and on earth a seed of Life. The seed contains the whole tree in little and in confusion, just as faith contains in little and in confusion the vision of God.

When the Saviour of the world ascended into heaven, the apostles followed Him with their eyes, but a cloud soon hid Him from their gaze; this obscurity produced faith and made them adore the Saviour seated on the right hand of God His Father. Moses ascended the mountain, and when he reached the summit he was enveloped in a cloud in which he saw God. That which we see of God in the world is only an image. We see Him in a greater and more lofty way within the obscurity which surrounds us. Those who sail the high seas gradually lose sight of land; in a little while they see nothing but the sea and the heavens; not because they are not still on earth, seeing that the earth is at the bottom of the sea, but that they no longer see it upon its surface. Contemplation is, as it were, the ship in which we sail the ocean



of faith: we no longer see the land, that is to say, earthly things, but the less we see of earthly things, the more we see of the immensities of heaven.

Moreover, Philothea, the greater this light of faith is, the more it causes us a marvellous delight in God alone. There is a certain contrivance of perspective which enchants the eye by making it see as at a vast distance, something which is quite close. Faith is that which brings us nearest to God as well as that which removes us farthest from Him, and therefore the more contemplation illumines faith, the more it shows us simultaneously a God Present and a God Infinite, a God with us, and a God above us; it puts us in the very heart of God at the same moment that it plunges us into an abyss of God. We do not yet distinguish the being of God, faith remaining always obscure, but we see it more clearly than before. All the flowers of a garden, and all the beauties of a meadow appear to us as they are, so soon as the sun rises; but when it is at its height we see those flowers and beauties with even greater pleasure, even though the sun no longer appears. O lovely haze which is an effect of radiance, thou art more noble and more excellent than light itself! And that of which we are ignorant in God is incomparably more perfect than that which we know. This has been called, by St. Denis and other contemplatives, a learned ignorance.<sup>1</sup>

*Philothea.* What do they mean by that?

*Director.* Contemplation is ignorance because it is abnegation of all human knowledge, silence of reason and the senses, but such ignorance is learned because in denying all that God is not, it embraces all that He is.

And beyond what we have said, Philothea, of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *De Mystica Theologia*, I, 1, and 3: "The Divine Dark is naught else but that inaccessible Light wherein the Lord is said to dwell."

clearness with which contemplation illumines faith, we must further remark that even although this happens in active contemplation, every time that it passes into infused or passive contemplation, the gift of understanding, which is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, illumines faith more extraordinarily, not only by a very gentle consent, but also by a more intimate penetration. The gift of understanding is a gift which makes us believe the truths necessary to our salvation with invincible certitude; just in the same way as in human knowledge there is an intelligence which makes us believe the first principles of science indubitably and invincibly, for who among men ever doubts that the whole is greater than the part, or holds that one and the same thing can be and not be? Thus, by the intelligence of the Holy Spirit, which is supernatural intelligence, we come to believe, without reflection and without ambiguity, that there is a God, that the Father begets the Son, and all the other truths of the faith. But by the exercise of contemplation we co-operate more efficaciously with this gift of intellect, and its influence communicates itself better to us; it enlightens faith and makes it clearer than it was before.

*Philothea.* Does this gift of intellect not reside, then, in all just men? Do they not all contemplate?

*Director.* We must not doubt that the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit accompany sanctifying grace in all souls; but the passions and the imperfections stifle their influence, and even though we cannot lose them save through mortal sin, any more than we can lose grace itself, it is certain that we only draw very little fruit from them because of the sins and other blemishes with which we fill ourselves. Now, the natural effect of the gift of intellect being to perfect the soul in matters of faith, the more the just man exercises faith, the more he attracts the riches of this gift,

which was only given for this end. This is the doctrine of St. Thomas, in his *Summa*, speaking of the gifts, also that of St. Bonaventura and of many others. While on this subject I must say it always fills me with amazement to see that some people will not allow that man should be able to dispose himself to contemplation, or even to the supernatural; seeing that he has already the habit of supernatural faith as a Christian, and the gift of intellect as a righteous man. Since as God does not give those two treasures in order that they may remain useless even in ordinary good men, and much more when He stirs and impels them by a particular *attrait*, it is a deplorable thing that those who are near the fountain should die of thirst; yet if some drink of this water, which they possess in themselves, they regard it as an extraordinary water, as unnatural and far-fetched, because they do not wish to drink it. In this they are like a capricious man, who being sought after on account of his noble birth, and not being able to forget his rank, would, nevertheless, belittle it out of spite, to tarnish the reputation of an enemy who sprang from the same stock. It is certain that we do not see clearly what we can do, save when we follow this movement of God with fidelity.

*Philothea.* You have told me that contemplation was wisdom. How, then, do you say now that it is aided by the gift of intellect?

*Director.* Here briefly is how the matter stands. When contemplation is active, it is because the understanding, which is enlightened by faith, reduces all the truths of faith to this one truth of God in Himself. But when contemplation becomes supernatural, the gift of wisdom gathers together and unites the same truths of the faith which the gift of intellect has penetrated most highly, and it reduces them all to this first and unique truth of God Pure.



Faith, even when supernatural, is obscure in the ordinary way, and contemplation springing from an obscure faith remains obscure. But faith, on the other hand, is made more luminous by the gift of intellect; and contemplation which is aroused by the gift of wisdom is more luminous than ordinary contemplation. Both are excellent, their object is infinite and infinitely lovable. But I have shown you the difference between them in the preceding Dialogues and I will not repeat them here, only reminding you that you must remember that acquired contemplation is a disposition closely related to infused contemplation; that it is not always expedient that one should make great efforts to distinguish them in oneself; and that while they may be different in manner, many of their excellencies are the same, the object of the one and the object of the other being pure, simple, and universal, both supporting themselves on faith and love, which are supernatural habitudes.

Finally, for the last definition I have to give you: Contemplation is a universal prayer which, in the consideration of God Present, embraces all the objects, all the motives, and all the ends of particular prayers.

*Philothea.* But how does this prayer embrace all requests?

*Director.* We read in the Gospel according to St. Matthew (vi, 33) that after the Saviour of the world had invited each of his disciples to state his needs, He comprised all His exhortations to them in those words, *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God . . . and all these things* (that is to say, all the things He had mentioned in particular) *shall be added unto you.* He who possesses God by a loving presence, demands nothing but the God he possesses, because he knows well that in Him he will find everything, and that if God has given Himself, He will not fail to supply our needs without our demanding them. He who

asks for particular things exercises love, but he who asks nothing else but God, rests in the very heart of love. *You have written well of me, Thomas*, said the Saviour of the world to this holy Doctor; *what recompense would you receive?* *Nothing but Thyself alone*, replied the Saint. Souls really detached from all things have difficulty in asking anything of God, if it is not His will. But when God, for certain reasons, makes them determine to ask for something, then they conduct themselves like the servant in the Gospel, who went to lay at his master's feet the five talents he had entrusted to him and the other five he had gained by his industry. *Master*, says the soul, *I submit my will and my requests; all are Thine, use them as Thine own*. And then God grants him his requests and He adds other ten talents to this grace, that is to say, a greater possession of Himself.

There are officers in the courts of princes who have the duty of presenting their princes with lists of requests. They simply present the lists without interesting themselves in the requests printed on them, sometimes without even knowing what they are. It is for the prince to grant them or refuse them. "Lord," says a soul to God, "look what nature, or necessity, or charity to my neighbour makes me ask of Thee. Do Thou grant it or refuse it. I wish nothing but Thyself." Thus the man who has only one will has never more than one request to make, and he asks everything in uniting himself in love to Him who is all.

*Philothea*. That, it seems to me, is not to ask anything new. It is to cling more closely to that which one possesses. But how is such a prayer also a supplication?

*Director*. He who walks continually in the presence of God supplicates Him sufficiently by all that He is; he can offer Him no grander motive than that of the Divine



Majesty. He is like a man who, being saved from the hands of those who pursued him, has taken refuge at the foot of the Altar; for without saying anything, the Altar defends and protects him. He who holds a crucifix in his hands supplicates God merely by continuing that action, and he who holds himself in the presence of God supplicates Him insensibly by His very sanctity to help him.

*Philothea.* I implore Him by all that He is, never to drive me from His holy presence. But how can this same prayer be on occasion a thanksgiving?

*Director.* I will help you to understand that by an example. There was once a devout woman who, whenever she received a good thought, felt herself so deeply indebted to God in that He had deigned to abase Himself in order to give her this good desire, that she wished He had created a new hierarchy of Seraphim to give Him thanks for one single thought, because of the lofty esteem of God with which she felt herself filled. And as God had inspired her to communicate very often, not knowing how more to show her regard for this singular grace, and feeling overwhelmed by the weight of one single thought, she said to Him one day, "Ah! Lord! I know not any more what to say; do Thou, therefore, thank Thyself, and take my silence as an acknowledgment of Thy greatness and my weakness!" That is just what a contemplative soul says, *Philothea*; it thanks God for everything in regarding Him ceaselessly; its very silence is an act of thanks and an august acknowledgment.

*Philothea.* There is, of course, no one but God Himself who could worthily thank Himself for all the benefits He bestows on us. But how can such prayer be a preparation for all things?



*Director.* Have you never heard tell of a philosopher who, having been shipwrecked and standing naked on the shore on which he had been cast up, replied to those who deplored his bad fortune, *I carry all my possessions with me.* He who performs some act of devotion always carries God in his heart by His actual presence, and how better could he prepare himself than by making this presence, as far as he can, more actual and more loving? He carries all his possessions and all his preparation with him. St. Ignatius asked his religious one day during their recreation, how each of them would like to die. Each one replied as he thought best. "As for me," said the saint, "I would like to die while doing what I do," meaning that the best preparation in all things was to do what God wanted of us. He who always regards God with love, is always ready. And if he does add other preparations, of obligation or charity, he refers them all to the first.

You may have noticed that sometimes poor girls are introduced in processions, and that they are decked out with all the jewels of the place; such girls have nothing but their poverty; all the rest does not belong to them, and nevertheless they are an adornment of the general devotion. The contemplative is the poor in spirit of the Gospel; he has nothing of his own to appear in before God, but he has the jewel God has given him of a loving presence, and he presents God to God Himself as all the preparation that is needed.

*Philothea.* Then if I do everything with God, I shall do nothing that is not fitting, and I shall do it with love. But how is it that this prayer contains all mysteries as well as all prayers, and how does one make use of this prayer when a mystery presents itself to be considered?

*Director.* God is the beginning, the end, and the consum-

mation of all mysteries, and the gentle and peaceful consideration of a mystery in His presence is the best way to consider it, because then it absorbs itself in God; whereas when we meditate on a mystery by our reason, it lifts us up to God, but it does not allow us to rest in Him. The eagle can fly as high as it wishes, but it cannot remain long in the heights if it does not find a mountain to rest on. Meditations raise us up very high and very near to God, but they have not that wherewith to sustain us. That is why so many souls stop short at the mystery and not at the God of the mystery. I assure you, Philothea, that though in the commerce of devotion all objects of sense are proposed to us in order to make us know God better, God is, nevertheless, that which we regard least in the mystery, and He remains the most unknown among a profusion of means of knowing Him. Also, one can abuse the mysteries and diminish the sentiments of religion by treating with imperfection or superstition all that is most holy in religion. That happens only too often even around our altars; but as for the loving regard of God, no one can abuse it, and it can produce nothing but love. That is why the best use we can make of our mysteries is not so much to examine them and scrutinize them, after we know what religion teaches us about them, but to inflame ourselves with the love of God, and it will come to pass that as the mysteries bring us nearer to God, He will enlighten us the more regarding them. When one strikes the flint in a tinder-box, the tinder catches the spark which comes from the flint, but immediately afterwards the flame consumes the tinder and converts it into itself. In the same way, the mystery unites us to God, and acts, so to speak, like a holy tinder which He Himself has prepared for us; but then He converts this

mystery into His love, and thus we are inflamed more by God than by the mystery.

In fact, *Philothea*, what, for example, is a greater thing to consider in the birth of Our Saviour, if not that it is a God who is born? And what is greater in His death than to know that it is a God who is dead? One never knows Jesus Christ better than when, from the heart of the Blessed Virgin we rise to the heart of His Father; He did but abase Himself down to us to raise us up to Himself. In a word, not only all the mysteries of faith but all the objects of nature and of grace receive so wonderful a radiance from their relation to God, that the consideration of any one of them fills the soul with joy and sweetness when they make us taste God. This loving presence lends a splendour to all things: it makes everything more beautiful and more living. Thus the sweet and tranquil thought of the mysteries brings us close to God, and God illumines the thought without our requiring for that reason to leave His presence.

When a priest vests himself from season to season in the different colours of the Church, when he changes the ceremonies and mysteries according to the days, it is always, for all that, the same Victim and the same Sacrifice. In the same way, although the soul changes its outward disposition, its interior sacrifice is always the same. The faculties are dead and the presence of God is always loving.

*Philothea*. Oh, what worthy homage we render God when we contemplate the mysteries in Him! How precious and how lovely all things are when viewed under this regard! I no longer admire heaven and earth for their beauties, but for the adorable intimation of God which shines through them.

But please have the goodness to explain to me further



how this marvellous prayer is a tacit exercise of all the virtues.

*Director.* It is easy to see that in considering its nature. He who waits in silence in the presence of God, exercises faith, seeing that he believes continually that God is his Sovereign Good. He exercises hope, seeing that, suspending his own acts, with one sole exception, he expects nothing save from God's generous Providence. He nobly practises love, since there is no better token of perfect love than that of wanting to live by nothing but the object one loves. He must have singular humility, and at the same time a sovereign esteem of God, seeing that he annihilates himself in order that God may be all things to him. All the virtues are supernatural or acquired habits to perfect the soul in good; and he exercises them all at once, who by a continual love unites himself to the Sovereign Good. Nevertheless, the exercise of particular virtues is not incompatible with contemplation; all the virtues inflame it, and it inflames all the virtues. Soldiers never fight more valiantly than when they fight in the presence of their prince, and the virtues are never stronger or more animated than when one exercises them in the loving sight of God.

Words fail me, Philothea, when I consider how much all the labours of active life, to which we may be obliged by our profession, are accompanied by consolation and delight, when we endure them in the presence of God. Many people find life tiresome because God is not their companion. Do everything and suffer everything in His sight, and everything will become easy to you, and will be the material of your perfection.

*Philothea.* I have often heard it said that charity united in itself all the virtues. I have no difficulty in

understanding that the loving act of the presence of God has the value of many acts, and that it unites them all together by its strength.

*Director.* That does not absolve us, Philothea, from producing the acts which duty imposes on each one, but we must produce them calmly and without strain, for when they do not in any way disturb the universal act, they will be absorbed into it, and thus our whole life will be nothing but uniform and continual love.

*Philothea.* Charity urges me still to ask you, for my neighbour's sake, whether every one may properly aspire to this prayer of quiet?

*Director.* All souls who aspire seriously to perfection, and who wish to die to themselves, can, according to the holy Doctors who have written on this matter, aspire to either ordinary or infused contemplation; not so much because it is a high and noble prayer as because it is the source of greater love of God, and a more perfect union with Him. Those who know, by reading books on the subject or by intercourse with experienced souls, the advantages contemplation brings, must at least ask it of God. And those who become aware of the signs of it in themselves must not tarry to put themselves in this way. Contemplation establishes the soul in perfect tranquillity, and every one may ask for this tranquillity; it arouses great love, and every one may ask to be put in the way of great love. It perfectly annihilates man in the eyes of God, and every one may ask for his own annihilation. The gift which God gives us of Himself in Holy Communion is, in truth, in its substance, a much greater gift than contemplation and all the privileges which accompany it. God requires no greater motive than His own goodness to draw us to Himself in whatever

manner may please Him; and we draw ourselves away from Him by a false idea of our unworthiness, an idea which covers a thousand faults and which maintains in us an everlasting coldness. We must ask nothing save by the good pleasure of God, aspire to nothing save by His grace, do nothing without the necessary signs, and declare those signs sincerely to those who direct us. But with this disposition we must aspire to the highest perfection in which it may please His Divine Majesty to establish us, and by the way He judges best. I can assure you, Philothea, that one encounters many more lazy souls who never go so far as God would like to draw them, than weaklings who go beyond their strength. For one imaginative soul who deceives herself, there are a hundred proud souls who draw back from the ways of God, and pride is much more general than illusion. But there is this difference between the two, that God often leaves the proud in their pride while He withdraws the simple from their illusion. Seek to please God in everything you undertake, and you will never deceive yourself in anything.

*Philothea.* What advice would you give to those who are commencing, as to the disposition they should bring to contemplation?

*Director.* It is the opinion of the most experienced Fathers and Doctors of the Church, that those accustomed to labour incessantly at meditation should relax much of their reasoning, and convert it into love; they should taste during long periods how lovable God is; they should say so to Him a hundred times a day; they should rejoice in that which God is, and in His infinite perfections; they should praise Him, bless Him, adore Him, glorify Him, and, in a word, make the understanding keep silence in



order to allow the will to act. What fires would spring from such meditations! Whereas very often all that results is a useless aridity, and a sterile habit of thinking of good things without drawing good movements from them. Certainly the smell of incense burning in a church, or the sound of noble music made there, sometimes leads to greater devotion than the gilded altars and marble pillars with which the church may be embellished. I can say in the same way that it is better worth while to arouse in oneself one good movement than many mediocre reasonings. We pray in order to love and not in order to reason, and very little suffices a willing soul. One must not seek to raise oneself, but to arouse oneself, feed oneself. That is why we should advise those who meditate to subdue themselves to love, and to dispose themselves in that way to this simple and general act of the loving knowledge of God. Those who have not the power of control must reduce themselves to simplicity, lest by doing violence to themselves, their brains should become over-excited, a thing which happens only too often. Those also who have too strong and too lively an imagination must calm those impetuosities and sallies which leave such disorder in their train; and excite the will rather than the understanding. Little matter and much love, Philothea, and the fire will light itself so often that at last it will remain always lighted. Those who are at the beginning, as well as those who are advanced, are right to produce the most perfect acts of love that are possible to them; even the conversion of sinners must begin by love. It is therefore not forbidden to them to use in meditation some act of loving contemplation, nor to introduce some intervals of quiet in order to taste God Pure in the midst of their prayer by a gentle effort, which, in making them sometimes leave

their discourse, establishes them more perfectly in the exercise of a living faith. All love of God tends to union with His nature; if, therefore, those who commence can love God, they can also achieve union with Him, each according to his powers and his industry. That is the doctrine of Suarez in his *Treatise on Religion*, in which he expressly decides, in favour of those who are beginning, that it is not expedient that the understanding should be in perpetual movement, but that it must rest from time to time in weighing and admiring some truth. Suarez assures us that this quiet powerfully helps a soul to arouse Divine Love in itself; that this is a beginning of contemplation, and that the more the soul persists in this quiet, the more it will advance to that blessed state; that it is necessary sometimes to try to see whether God has opened the door for us, and that we must enter when He does open to us, seeing that it is the Master who calls us. I should be too lengthy if I quoted to you all that he says, or if I referred to all those teachers of their own views whom I only cite with regret; I would rather speak on this matter by my own insight than by the light of others.

We certainly enter prayer in order to speak to God, but we also enter it to listen to Him; how shall we hear Him if we are always speaking, always discussing, always heaping one consideration on another? Silence is an interior ear, and when that which is inspired in us is good, when it is in conformity with the Scriptures and the Church and when it is accompanied by discretion, why so much debate and argument? He who argues is not anxious to give way, and he is often more afraid of being won over than of being deceived.



*Philothea.* I have often found myself inclined to let myself pass into this gentle quiet during meditation, and I have more often experienced this quiet when I made some ardent aspirations and longings towards God, than when I reasoned much. There are nurses who please themselves by dressing up the children they nurse, and making them into dolls by covering them with trinkets and a hundred little embellishments. Yet when they should be suckled, they allow them to cry three or four times. In the same way I used to please myself exceedingly by embellishing and adorning my meditation, so much that I had hardly the strength to lift my eyes to the heavens, and my soul remained thirsty for God.

By what signs may one know when one should give way to this gentle *attrait*?

*Director.* When God invites us to this quiet, He causes every movement contrary to Him to cease; the imagination can no longer supply itself with images, the understanding can no longer meditate, and there remains to the will nothing but a sweet and tranquil love of which we are conscious during the quiet, but which we should very soon extinguish by doing violence to ourselves. And if any power of meditation should remain to the soul, at least meditation does not please it as it did before; the soul finds in it nothing but tedium and dryness. The reason of this change is that it has received the spirit and the substance of the meditation, which was union and repose with God. When the soul abandons itself to its *attrait*, it is utterly recollected; it admires, it is astounded, it does not know by what art it rests in God. The very efforts which the soul makes at this time in order to know whether or not it deceives itself, are really so many signs to it to establish itself, for it feels itself urged towards this



interior repose with more force than formerly; it is impelled to it in itself, and during the whole day it is conscious of the inspiration it got in prayer, the habit of this loving presence forming itself insensibly even in the midst of the commerce of active life.

Moreover, the soul passes whole hours tranquilly in this general act of love, and everything that helps to maintain it begins to please it much; such as solitude and silence, and the avoiding of external distractions. For if the soul, after having quitted meditation, had not this act to feed and satisfy it, it would languish and do nothing but waste its time.

*Philothea.* Can inability to meditate arise from our own tepidity and our own fault?

*Director.* If it does, such inability will soon cease, and we will resume our acts with the old fervour.

*Philothea.* Is it not possible that there could be melancholy in this quiet?

*Director.* Melancholy ceases and meditation returns. We need nothing to put ourselves back in our way, save to diversify the material of meditation and repair our forces by sleep and change of occupation. But melancholy never produces love of God, nor invests us with His presence day and night.

*Philothea.* There are souls who are afflicted with inability to meditate or to act, yet they feel no love. What is one to think of them?

*Director.* When God has the intention to purge a soul Himself, He puts it in a state in which it cannot make any acts, and He even removes from it this general love of which we have spoken. But even so, the soul does not waste its time. It suffers and it seeks to please God in every way it can; it fears that it has offended Him, and a

tranquil solicitude is then its most perfect state. Very soon after, it tastes the fruits of its patience by receiving lights, ardours, and other extraordinary favours. God never mortifies save to give more abundant life; He never starves save to feed more liberally.

*Philothea.* Is this general act always perceptible to him who has it?

*Director.* The purer it is, the less perceptible it is. The less pure it is, the more one perceives it, because it is mingled with something sensible and intelligible. Water is not pure when it has any taste or colour. When the flame is dense, it is a sign that there is smoke in its heart. The ray of the sun which is too visible has found atoms in the air which have troubled its purity; when it is quite pure one can hardly see it at all. Thus, from the time when the soul has stripped itself of forms and images, it receives a ray of the Divine, purer and more imperceptible; but it recognizes its excellence by the repose in which it leaves it, and by the fruit it produces on all occasions of action or suffering.

Sometimes, too, God communicates Himself to the soul with so great a simplicity that it no longer sees either light or darkness. For, whilst the first shining of the Divine still allows the soul to perceive a certain darkness, this is a pure oblivion and the soul is as if lost in God. The excellence of this oblivion is perceived also by its fruits, and generally in all the gifts of God; whether the soul discerns them or not, it becomes more holy, more humble, more faithful, and more mortified, than it was before.

*Philothea.* Is this oblivion such that one no longer remembers God?

*Director.* The oblivion may be complete as regards all

created things, but not as regards God, otherwise it would be a sleep and not a prayer. It is true that the thought of God is sometimes so general and so pure, that the soul does not perceive it sensibly, especially when the light is in the understanding without acting at all on the will. But the soul always adheres to God, and it feels some time afterwards what God has wrought in it during its oblivion. Joseph deceived his brothers very pleasantly when, along with the grain he had sold them, he had money put into their sacks. When the soul abandons itself to God in the quiet to which He attracts it, without any affectation, and without wishing to know what He is doing in it, it finds itself rich at the end, and finds things in itself which it can explain in general, as well as other things which it cannot explain at all.

*Philothea.* Will you not tell me something of the privileges of contemplation and of the great blessings which accompany it?

*Director.* Philothea, I have attempted to take you into the garden of the Bridegroom, but not to describe to you the fruits and flowers. This Garden of Contemplation is vast and great; it is for Him to lead you along its paths as it pleases Him. Be faithful to God, and God will be liberal to you. Never try to go before God; follow Him always, and do not trouble about anything but loving Him, never mind if you cannot see Him. The first woman was curious, and she became the last of all creatures: the Blessed Virgin was humble, and she became the Mother of God. Whosoever desires anything beyond God, if it is not for God Himself, deserves to lose God. Humility will serve you as an anchor in the haven of the graces, and not allow you to lose yourself among favours or in repose, and this humility will also be your trusty vessel on the



ocean of tribulation, to carry you safe to port. There are great graces and great tribulations in the way of God. Leave Him to dispense His treasures and His pains with His incomparable wisdom, and do not try to learn things except on occasion and in need. Remind yourself of what I have told you regarding mystical books, that one should never read them save under advice. They are like those elixirs and essences which work wonders in sick bodies, but which burn and consume those who are not sick; they are pernicious to some and, nevertheless, necessary to others, not in order to teach them, but to guide them and confirm them in that which God does.

I pray God that you may ever draw nearer and nearer to Him, while moving ever farther and farther away from yourself.

*Approbation of the Doctors*

We, the undersigned Doctors of the Faculty of Theology of Paris, certify that we have read the book entitled *Pratique Facile pour élever l'Âme à la Contemplation*, written by F. M., in which we have found nothing which is not conformable to the Catholic Faith and to good practices, in token of which we have signed here.

Given at Paris this fifteenth of July, 1669.

N. PIGNAY

M. HUMBELOT

*Extract from the Sanction of the King*

By grace and sanction of the King given on October 27, 1669, signed by the King in his MAIDEN Council and sealed.

It is granted to Florentin Lambert, Bookseller at Paris to publish a book entitled *Pratique facile pour élever l'Âme à la Contemplation*. And it is forbidden to all publishers, librarians, and other persons, to print, sell, or produce, any other impression than that which has been published by the said Lambert or those authorized by him, for a period of seven years from the day it shall have been published for the first time, on pain of confiscation of the counterfeit copies, of 1500 livres penalty, and of all damages, expenses, and interests. This will apply to Extracts from this book as well as to the original.

Registered in the Book of the Society of Printers and Librarians of this city, December 6, 1699.

Signed,

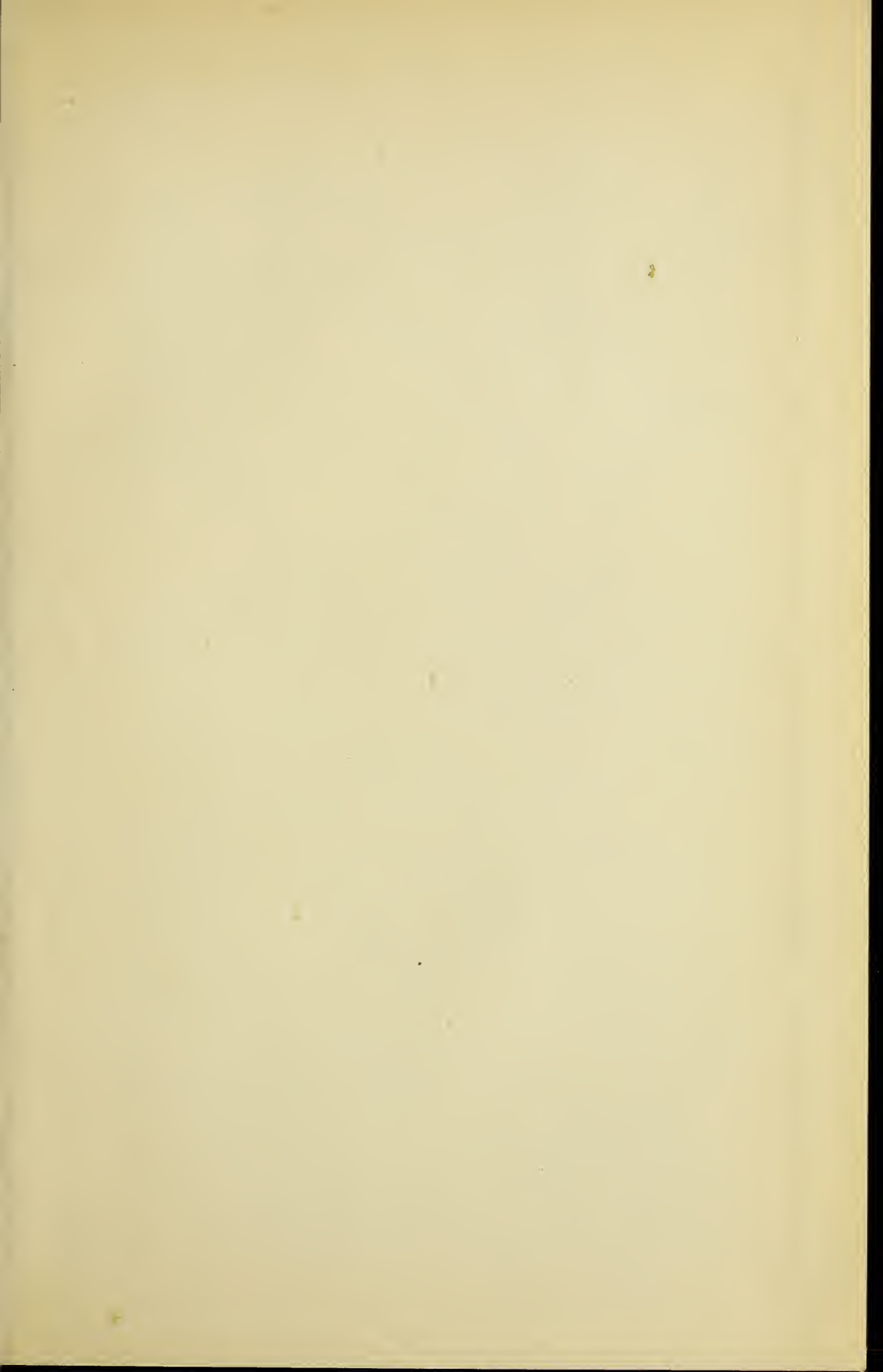
ANDRÉ SOUBRON,  
Syndic.

*First published March 15, 1670.*

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